



PHD

Exploring young people's experiences of foster care using a social capital approach Disrupted networks and continuing bonds

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Exploring young people's experiences of foster care using a social capital approach

Disrupted networks and continuing bonds

Volume 1 of 1

Justin Mark Rogers

A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

University of Bath

Department of Social and Policy Sciences

September 2014

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Abstract

This PhD study explored the day to day lives of young people living in foster care in the United Kingdom. This study utilises Bourdieu's (1986) conceptualisation of social capital, which has been described as a useful heuristic as it focuses on practices and processes (Morrow 1999) within networks. One of the original contributions of this thesis is its application of Bourdieu's theory as an analytical framework to explore young people's experiences of foster care.

The study employed qualitative methods to gather rich, contextualised data. Ten young people, aged between twelve to fourteen years old, participated in the research and each of the participants were interviewed on two occasions. Findings are presented across three chapters and they highlight the ways young people in foster care both preserve and build their access to social capital. Firstly, this includes the ways in which the young people are actively engaged in practices to manage and preserve their relationships and as a result their access to social capital. Secondly, findings show that young people in foster care experience stigma by virtue of having the status of being 'in- care', and in order to minimise this, the young people actively managed their spoiled identity (Goffman 1968), which allowed them to maintain access to social capital. Thirdly, the findings show that despite the experience of disrupted networks and multiple placement moves, given the opportunity, the participants demonstrated their ability to persevere in their attempts to start again, which built their access to social capital.

This thesis offers a particular utility for the discipline of social work, by providing a way of understanding and theorising how young people continually work, in both prosaic and at times heroic ways, to minimise the disruption to their relationships, networks and their subsequent access to social capital.

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Hold on to your friends

Resist or move on...

Just bear in mind, oh there just might come a time

When you need some friends

(Morrissey 1994)

*This thesis is dedicated to the memory of Mary
Medley. Mary was a kind person, and if you
needed them she would have given you the shoes
off of her feet.*

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Introduction

This PhD study aimed to explore the experiences of young people living in foster care in the UK. Over the past forty years there has been a shift in social work policy and practice from the use of institutional and residential care arrangements towards family placement such as fostering and adoption (Kelly & Gilligan 2000). In 2011, 87000 children and young people lived in public care in the United Kingdom and over 70% of them lived in foster care (The Fostering Network 2011).

Young people in foster care are a disadvantaged group who have experienced 'disrupted pathways' which have led them in to public care (Schofield 2003, p.6). Young people entering public care are likely to have experienced abuse and or neglect (Schofield et al. 2000; Sinclair 2005; Biehal et al. 2010) and/or have parents that experience mental health or drug and alcohol difficulties (Schofield 2003; Sinclair 2005). Schofield (2003, p.6) describes how these experiences mean young people come to foster care with 'a history of a developmental pathway that is likely to lead to some developmental risk'. Research also suggests that young people in foster care experience placement breakdowns that results in multiple moves (Schofield et al. 2000; Sinclair 2005; Biehal et al. 2010). Ofsted (2011) reported that the average number of placement moves for a young person in care is four. Therefore, the experience of growing up in care can compound disadvantage as young people may have to live within different families resulting in the need to move areas and change schools, thus further disrupting their lives.

The existing literature on foster care has predominantly taken an empirical approach, focusing on outcomes (Stein 1994; Biehal et al. 1994; Kelly & Gilligan 2000; Sinclair 2005). Berridge (2007) describes how this has provided valuable lessons for policy and practice; however he also criticises the empirical approach for being at times atheoretical and too descriptive. The literature has also been criticised for lacking a detailed analysis of young people's experiences that highlights their strengths and resilience instead of

focusing solely on their limitations and deficiencies (Winter 2006). In light of this there have been calls to undertake research into the experiences of young people in foster care using sociologically informed approaches in order to gain nuanced understandings (Berridge 2007; Winter 2006). C. Wright Mills (1959, p.7) described the notion of the sociological imagination as 'the vivid awareness of the relationship between experience and the wider society.' This thesis applies a sociological imagination to research with young people in foster care in order to explore their experiences within the context of wider society. To achieve this the thesis draws on the social theory of Pierre Bourdieu who established, through the concepts of habitus, field and capital, a body of work which at its core attends to the interplay between individual agency and social structure.

The move to foster care results in young people having to adjust to living within a different family, this can also mean living in a different area and attending a different school. These changes mean young people experience disrupted social networks. This thesis examines these social networks and takes a specific focus on Bourdieu's concept of social capital which recognises the resources embedded in a person's social networks. Social capital is a concept that has successfully been applied to research with children and young people in a UK context (Morrow 2001b; Weller 2006; Holland et al. 2007; Hampshire & Matthijsse 2010) and it has been described as a useful heuristic device (Morrow 2001b). The concept is utilised in this study as a lens to examine how young people in foster care interact in practices and processes within their social networks to preserve, maintain and build access to social capital.

Although the thesis makes an important and original theoretical contribution, by applying these concepts to this population, the theoretical framework has not been adopted to purely extend sociological theory; but rather to apply sociological thinking in order to gain a nuanced account of how young people in foster care interact within the social world. The thesis

explores how young people are engaged in practices within their social networks, which enable them to preserve and develop their access to the resource of social capital. Ultimately, the findings of the study are of value to social work policy and practice as they provide an understanding of how young people attempt to maintain and indeed improve their access to social capital. This is of benefit to practice as it highlights ways to best support children and young people in their efforts to cope with the disruption to their relationships, networks and subsequent access to social capital.

To achieve this, the study employed qualitative methods to gather rich data, which provides valuable contextualised understandings of the experience of foster care. Ten young people living in foster care participated in the research and they were between the ages of twelve to fourteen. Each participant was interviewed on two occasions, so the data was gathered across a total of twenty interviews. Visual methods were utilised, which included eco-mapping and photo-elicitation techniques.

The thesis consists of nine chapters and it is organised into three parts, in the first part the conceptual framework of the study is introduced. This begins in chapter 1, with a review of the social theory and key concepts of Pierre Bourdieu. This includes a critical analysis of the concepts of field, habitus and capital, which establishes the epistemology that underpins the theoretical and analytical framework of the study. Bourdieu developed a social theory focusing on the interplay between structure and agency (Houston 2002), which was underpinned by a commitment to social justice (Houston 2002; Garrett 2007a) and he also demonstrated an interest in the social work profession (Bourdieu 1998). These points represent the initial justification for choosing a Bourdieusian theoretical framework. This analysis intends to develop a framework of theory that underpins a way of understanding the complexities of a young person's experiences within foster care and the wider society, which is congruent with social work values with a clear commitment to social justice. Chapter 2 consists of a thematic

review of the social capital literature. The themes of social networks, typologies of social capital, participation, reciprocity, and sense of belonging are critically analysed. Throughout these two chapters, consideration is given to the utility of applying the concepts to the empirical study of children and young people and specifically those living in foster care in the UK.

At the end of the first part of the thesis a section has been included on the concept of stigma as understood by Goffman (1968). This is a more recent addition to the theoretical framework and this was necessary because during the data analysis the concept emerged as being key, to offering an understanding of the young people's experiences and interactions within their social networks.

In the second part of the thesis the research design is presented across two chapters. Firstly, in chapter 3 the research question is explained and then the methodology is set out, which establishes the ontological approach to the study by highlighting the qualitative ways in which the research question will be explored. Secondly, chapter 4 takes a focus on research processes and examines the procedures that were followed in order to gather and analyse the data.

In the third part of the thesis findings are presented across three chapters. In chapter 5, themes are presented that relate to the myriad ways in which the young people engaged in practices to manage their relationships in their social networks, which functioned to preserve their access to bonding social capital. Chapter 6 highlights how young people attempt to manage their identity and the potentially stigmatizing status of being 'in care'. Findings illustrate that this stigma has the potential to lead to exclusion by their peers that can lead to them ending up in the 'out- group' (Goffman 1968), which can impact negatively upon their access to social capital. However, this stigmatized status can also offer benefits with the potential opportunity to belong to a fostered peers 'in-group' (Goffman

1968), which can serve as an important source of bonding social capital. In chapter 7, the findings highlight that despite the significant disruption the young people have experienced in their early lives, given the opportunity, they are able to persevere to build relationships and engage in networked activities, which builds their access to social capital. The chapter also includes an account of how the young people engage in practices of memorialisation, which often involves displays of their social networks as memorials to their disrupted and lost relationships. These displays have a purpose as they enable the young people to continue their bonds with the people in their network that are important to them. Therefore, the displays act as a source of emotional support to draw on and utilise, as such they represent a valued form of social capital.

Part 4 concludes the thesis with a focus on the implications for social work policy and practice. Chapter 8 begins by exploring how the findings presented in the previous three chapters address the research aim and objectives. The chapter then presents a detailed discussion of the key findings and then concludes with five key messages for social work policy and practice. Chapter 9 is the final chapter; it presents the conclusions that can be drawn from the thesis and goes on to identify the limitations of the study and then makes recommendations for future areas of research

Part 1 Conceptual Framework

Chapter 1 Pierre Bourdieu's theory of practice

The social theory of Pierre Bourdieu significantly informs the thesis and in particular his conceptualisation of social capital, which has been utilised in the theoretical frameworks of a number of studies with young people in the UK (Morrow 2001b; Weller 2006; Holland et al. 2007; Hampshire & Matthijsse 2010). These studies have covered topics ranging from young people's experiences of growing up in disadvantaged neighbourhoods in Belfast (Holland et al 2007), to young people's experiences of civic participation on the Isle of Wight (2006). In this chapter Bourdieu's key scholarly contributions to the social sciences are highlighted in order to establish a conceptual framework, which guided the research. The chapter begins by adopting a reflexive approach that aims to make explicit the reasons for choosing Bourdieu and highlighting the apparent fit between his social theory and social work (Garrett 2007a; Houston 2002).

Although the central tenet of the study's theoretical framework is social capital, Bourdieu's approach to the concept can only be understood within the context of his concepts of field, habitus and capital (Bourdieu 1986). Therefore, this chapter highlights the nexus between field, habitus and capital and how this relates to the notion of social capital employed in this study with young people in foster care in the UK. It is through these key concepts that Bourdieu (1989) established the epistemological position of his social theory which he referred to as structuralist constructivism. It is therefore necessary to critically discuss these concepts in order to establish the epistemological underpinnings of the thesis and demonstrate how, in this study, Bourdieu's approach to social theory is utilised to frame the reality of the young people's interactions in their social networks.

'Tools for thinking'

Robbins (2007, p.88) describes how 'Bourdieu assumed that any engagement with the work of another author was a form of inter-personal engagement, involving an elective affinity'. In choosing a Bourdieusien approach I recognise this call for reflexivity and the need to declare the elective affinity I have begun to develop for his work. I came to the PhD with a specific interest in researching young people's experiences of foster care, an interest that was founded in my experience of working directly with carers and young people as a social worker in the field of family placement. Developing this research interest further involved a review of a range of existing research, which included the studies that focused on young people in foster care but also beyond to broader research by scholars of childhood that explore a diverse range of young people's experiences in their social world. This led me to discover Weller's (2006) article 'Skateboarding together'. Weller's (2006) study utilised a social capital approach that provided nuanced insights and understandings into the ways young people interact with their family, peers and communities. It was from this study that I recognised the potential value of applying the theory of social capital to experiences of young people in care.

During a review of the literature focusing on social capital, the fit between Pierre Bourdieu's conceptualisation, which is grounded in uncovering the practices that reproduce inequality and social work values became apparent. I then began to develop my knowledge of the wider concepts of Pierre Bourdieu and their utility in understanding the experiences of young people in foster care in the UK. This engagement with Bourdieu's work and his focus on the importance of reflexivity has inspired me to reflect upon my own life and apply these 'tools for thinking' to my experiences. Bourdieu's concepts have enabled me to think about my path in life and to reflect on the experiences and opportunities along the way. Bourdieu's conceptual apparatus has encouraged me to become reflexive

and beyond this study it has provided me with a lens in order to critically view the social world.

Bourdieu and social work

The application of the chosen conceptual apparatus to this thesis forms an integral part of the study, by highlighting the strengths and limitations of applying the key concepts to this population of young people in foster care. As such, one of the contributions that the thesis makes is by developing and extending Bourdieu's social theory by applying his concepts to a specific field of empirical inquiry. Houston (2002, p.149) argues that in the field of social work Bourdieu's social theory has value as it 'attends to the interplay of agency and structure.' Bourdieu has been recognised as a key theorist for social work as he promotes the importance of understanding an individual's subjective experiences whilst recognising the influence of social structures (Garrett 2007b), such as educational institutions, schools and universities. Houston (2002, p.163) highlights how applying Bourdieu's theory to practice 'enables practitioners to gain an in depth understanding of the nexus constituting the person in society' and goes on to explain how 'this understanding lies at the heart of anti-oppressive practice'. Therefore, Bourdieu's approach to social theory has value for this thesis as it enables the framing of young people's experiences within their social environments.

Garrett (2007a) argues that Bourdieu's opposition to neo-liberalism that he viewed as resulting in the erosion of public services for the vulnerable, demonstrated a commitment to social justice, which is in keeping with social work values. Lane (2000) explains that this commitment was evidenced not only in Bourdieu's academic writing but also in the way he spoke out in media interviews against inequality as well as the support he gave to the trade union and student movements. Houston (2002) and Garrett (2007a) both highlight an apparent fit between the values underpinning Bourdieu's scholarly contributions and the social work project that aims to empower and promote social justice. This is evidenced by the International

Federation of Social Work (IFSW 2010) who provide a definition of social work that uses the term social justice at its core. Bourdieu (1998) also wrote directly about social work and in particular the challenges that practitioners face working within neo-liberal bureaucracies, which promote the retreat of the state and that privilege individual responsibility in the management of social problems. Garret (2007b, p.356) notes that this 'concern about the trajectory of social work is unusual in a high profile social theorist'. However, despite this apparent fit, the application of his theory to social work has been limited and presents as a gap in the literature (Houston 2002; Garrett 2007). Garrett argues, despite the prevalence of Bourdieu's application in the fields of sociology and education it is more limited in social work.

The epistemology and ontology of Bourdieu's social theory

Bourdieu (1992, p.50) argues that his contribution to social theory offers a practical set of 'tools for thinking' aimed at reconciling what he viewed as distinct epistemological positions in the social sciences of constructivism and structuralism. Bourdieu viewed these polar positions as divisive and argued that his work attempts to achieve what Grenfell and James (1998, p.2) refer to as an epistemological 'third way' that 'establishes an alternative to the extremes of post-modernist subjectivity and positivist objectivity'. Ozbilgin and Tatli (2005, p.856) describe how Bourdieu's project is 'located in the context of the heritage of the social science field of late 1950s France, which was dominated by the 'objective' structuralism of Levi-Strauss and the 'subjective' existentialism of Sartre.' For Bourdieu these distinct theoretical approaches were problematic and in his later interviews he stated that his entire body of theory is an attempt to merge these positions (Lane 2000).

Bourdieu (1989, p.14) developed his conceptual tools that offer an epistemological approach to social science that he referred to as 'structuralist constructivism.' Bourdieu explains how this provides a way of

understanding the interplay between structure and agency. In adopting this approach Bourdieu attempts to reconcile philosophical debates in the social sciences about the influence of structured social spaces and the influence of an individual's subjective agency. Bourdieu acknowledges that social actions stem from subjective experience and as such meanings of experience are constructions influenced by individual circumstances from both the past and the present. Bourdieu's approach fits with the social science tradition of critical realism (Potter 2000a) as it recognises the influence of social structures.

Structuration

Elsewhere, the social theorist Giddens (1986) has also addressed structure and agency as a central issue in his work and again has also been described as another critical realist (Potter 2000). Giddens (1986) developed the model of structuration where he argues people's life chances are not predefined by the social structure, but instead they reproduce structures through a process of socialisation. Giddens argues that structures are not repressive barriers but actually reproduce action, whereby agents have the ability to challenge and change structures. Bourdieu's social theory relates to this as he also acknowledges the ways structures are reproduced through social practices. Bourdieu's approach is also similar when one considers his concepts of field, habitus and capital where he recognises people's agency and ability to move within social structures.

However, Bourdieu's approach differs to Giddens as he acknowledges Marxist ideas (Field 2003) including the power of class hierarchies and their constraining impact upon the less privileged members of society. For example, Bourdieu's (1984) own empirical work focused on inequality and privilege, and he highlighted how a person's position within social structures is not entirely attributable to their individual strengths or deficiencies but also influenced by the stocks of both symbolic and economic capital that they inherit. Bourdieu also built on the ideas of social structure

with a wider conceptual apparatus that highlights how relationships and practices are both reproduced and reproduce the structure.

This focus on inequality and the restrictive power of class hierarchies, has led to Bourdieu's concepts being criticised as deterministic, with agents being overly constrained by structures and coerced to act in an unconscious way (Jenkins 2002; Lahire 2003). However, Atkinson (2011, p.5) argues that this criticism is often due to the 'misreading, misinterpretation and decontextualization...' of Bourdieu's work. Reay (2004, p.437) describes how there is a possibility for this to happen because different parts of his body of work, which includes over 40 books and 200 articles, 'provide more space for agency than others'. Bourdieu (1989) directly defended his work against the charge of determinism describing that although a social structure may be viewed as being a stable entity there is always the possibility within the structure for change. Bourdieu (1993, p.271) also highlighted that his concepts were meant to offer ways of studying structure and agency 'in the specificity of an empirical reality' and as such they were not methods to follow like a handbook but to adapt and rework for specific contexts. Bourdieu's (1992) conceptual apparatus that includes the notions of field, habitus and capital underpin the theoretical framework of this thesis. The following section of the chapter offers an analysis of these concepts in order to apply them to the specific context of research with young people in foster care.

Field

This study is taking a focus on the embedded resources within the social networks of young people in foster care, which is their social capital (Bourdieu 1986). The study of fields is not a central focus of this thesis however it is necessary to acknowledge and discuss field as a conceptual tool because for Bourdieu, it is within this construct that capital, in all its forms including social capital, is generated, utilised and exchanged.

For Bourdieu (1977), social structures are implicit in shaping and constructing social relationships and he refers to these structured spaces as 'fields'. Grenfell and James (1998, p.12) describe fields as objective structured social spaces, however they also explain that they represent 'an initial break with objectivism' as they are 'objective structures that are not only identifiably structured: they are identifiably structuring'.

Bourdieu (1989) cites art, education and politics as examples of fields and describes how they appear in different manifestations that are interrelated. Fields are situated within an overarching field of power that runs horizontally across them, which Bourdieu argued represents the social surface or structure of society. For Bourdieu, people are positioned within fields in a hierarchical way with fields having elements of competition within them, whereby social agents are participating in a game. At stake in this game is the accumulation of capital, which gives power to buy positioning within the field. Bourdieu acknowledged that because of this element of competition the concept cannot be applied to every form of structure in society, be it cultural or institutional. For example, Bourdieu (1992, p.100) 'seriously doubted' whether cultural associations such as choirs were a form of field because within them capital is not at stake and therefore there is no competition between agents.

Others have criticised Bourdieu's concept of field. For example, Lahire (2002) argued the concept was not able to account for the heterogeneity that exists between individuals in groups. Atkinson (2011) challenges Lahire's view and argues that there is scope for heterogeneity within Bourdieu's theory as people are members of various different fields and hold different positions in each. However, Lahire also argues that such an approach suggests a fragmented account of social agents, with people becoming multiple social agents acting in different ways in different fields. In effect this means people are broken down in to multiple agents that are only unified by a personal name. For Lahire, breaking down society in to separate

fields is problematic as he states it is then difficult to recombine them in order to grasp the whole. However, the following quotation from Bourdieu (1992, p.110) highlights how he acknowledges the complexity and the conceptual limitations when applying field in order to understand social phenomena:-

‘The notion of field does not provide ready-made answers to all possible queries in the manner of the grand concepts of ‘theoreticist theory’ which claims to explain everything in the right order. Rather, its major virtue, at least in my eyes, is that it promotes a mode of construction that has to be rethought anew every time. It forces us to raise questions about the limits of the universe under investigation, how it is articulated... It offers a coherent system of recurrent questions that saves us from the theoretical vacuum of positivist empiricism and from the empirical void of theoreticist discourse.’
(Bourdieu 1992, p.110)

With this quotation Bourdieu reinforces his view that his concepts are intended as ‘*tools for thinking*’ that require a reflexive approach when they are applied to a specific empirical reality. For example, applying Bourdieu’s notion of field to young people in foster care acknowledges that their lives and experiences are shaped by fields. The system of public care is located within a field that Bourdieu referred to as the ‘bureaucratic field’; that being a social structure that influences welfare and public services and subsequently the lives of young people in foster care. The way in which the bureaucratic field has directly influenced the lives of young people in foster care can be illustrated with the shift in the past seventy years from a care system before the second world war that predominantly placed children and young people in residential care, to a system that now recognises family placement and foster care as the most appropriate arrangement (Kelly & Gilligan 2000). In this context a child entering public care today could be living in a very different situation to a child entering public care thirty years

ago. Therefore, the structured social space of the 'bureaucratic field' and the system of public care has the power to determine the difference between growing up in an institutional or familial setting and this difference depends on the dominant thinking of the field at that time. Bourdieu (2000a) referred to these forms of dominant thinking as doxa which are pre-reflexive, schemes of perception; the laws that direct a field and govern social practices. Bourdieu provided the following terms as examples of doxa within fields 'art for art's sake' and 'business is business'. Therefore, the doxa determines the placement preferences for children in public care may be summarised as the notion that a family placement is the best option for a looked after child.

Habitus

Bourdieu (1977, p.72) explained how fields are structured by 'habitus' which he describes as the influence of 'a system of lasting and transposable individual dispositions'. Therefore, within the notion of habitus, dispositions are durable as they last over time and they are transposable as they become active in social action. Bourdieu explains habitus as having an action generating principle and how it is the past being enacted in the present. For Bourdieu, habitus 'functions at every moment as a matrix of perceptions, appreciations and actions and made possible the achievement of infinitely diversified tasks' (Bourdieu 1977, p.72). Haugaard (2002, p.225) describes how 'the habitus furnishes a tacit knowledge of how to 'go on' as a competent social agent. It is a form of disposition derived from life experience. In this sense, habitus is both an internalisation of reality and, in the moment of practice, an externalisation of the self-constituted through past experience. Through the use of habitus in social practice, history, as past experience, becomes projected into the future.' Therefore, habitus is not a biological trait that someone is born with it is something that is acquired through the repetition of social practices, like a habit. This element of habitus that focuses on the 'moment of practice' (Haugaard 2002, p.225) has potential

to serve as a useful point of conceptualisation for this study in to a sensitive topic. For example, the participants in the study have arrived at this point in their lives with complex individual biographies, due to the nature of public care they may have experienced varying degrees of abuse and or neglect, and they have all experienced separation and lived apart from their parents. There is the potential for participants to be unaware of their early life experiences, or in this research context where they are sharing their experiences they may not wish to share or disclose them to an interviewer. Habitus will act as a useful concept in this situation as it allows a focus on the dynamic in the present. This will allow an exploration of current practices and the meanings the young people ascribe to them and the sense they make of how their disposition may impact their future trajectories and hopes for the future.

Lahire (2003, p.330) criticises Bourdieu's approach to habitus however for assuming homogeneity of habitus between individuals in a field and he argues that by referring to systems of dispositions he fails to adequately recognise the 'heterogeneity and subtlety of human lives'. Despite this complexity and a limitation in accounting for subtlety, for Bourdieu the key concepts employed together are an attempt to facilitate a unit of analysis beyond that of the subjective individual. Bourdieu (1992) explains that at the centre of the work is an attempt to ameliorate the dualist positions of the subjective and objective. Bourdieu argues that people who share the same space within a field do share a degree of homogeneity, as they will have more in common than they would with people in different positions within the field. This means that although people may be associating daily with others who occupy different positions than them in social space, they may have little in common with them. Furthermore, they may have more similarities with people in the same field space as them, even though they have never met. This is an interesting point to consider for this study as the young people who are placed in foster care may be living with foster carers who have access to greater stocks of capital and occupy different field

positions to them and their family and may share a very different habitus. This has the potential to be problematic for a young person, who may have moved areas away from groups in certain fields and a habitus within which they feel comfortable. Bourdieu describes how this fit between a person's habitus and field as resulting in a feeling of being like a 'fish in water', or if your habitus was no longer appropriate for your position in the field as being a 'fish out of water'. Bourdieu (1988) referred to this condition where the habitus no longer fits with the field as hysteresis. This is a condition young people in foster care may experience, due to the move from their own family to a foster family that may have a very different cultural or socio-economic background than their own.

Jenkins (2006) describes Bourdieu's key concepts as deterministic and he is particularly critical of habitus as an embodied notion where agents act in an unconscious way. In his later works Bourdieu (1999) invited sociologists to adopt a reflexive approach to their research but Jenkins (2006) argues, that despite this invitation, the major limitation of the theory is that it neglects to recognise the ability of social agents to be reflexive and exercise agency as they are almost habitually conditioned to act in an unquestioning and certain way. However, Bourdieu also described the relationship between habitus and field as dynamic and being reconstituted through the practices and processes that facilitate the exchange of capital. Therefore, these practices of exchange lead to the possibility of agency being exercised and the potential for structures to be changed.

Reay et al. (2011) utilised the concept of habitus in order to illustrate their findings from a study of middle class parents and their decision making around choosing schools for their children. Through interviews with a number of parents who had attended private school themselves and within this context, Reay et al, described examples of parents 'reacting' to or 'recreating' their habitus. For example, some parents made the conscious decision to react to their habitus and send their child to a comprehensive

school whilst others recreated their habitus and sent their child to a private school. Reay et al. (2011, p.36) argued that in applying the concept it is 'categorically not to explore what habitus is, but rather using it as a heuristic tool that helps to understand practices as complex situated actions with a range of precursors and a range of consequences, anticipated unanticipated, highly visible or less visible'. Reay et al.'s application of habitus in an empirical study illustrates how the concept represents the action generating principles in social fields and demonstrates how it can provide understandings into the ways in which agents interact within social spaces. This also highlights how Bourdieu's concept of habitus influences and determines actions which in turn determine the positions that people occupy in fields. This positioning is also heavily influenced by the capital that an agent possesses, which is discussed in the following section.

Capital

The concepts of field and habitus acknowledge that social structures (fields) are constructed and given meaning by agent's dispositions (habitus). It is within the notion of field that Bourdieu introduced his conceptual account of capital where this studies key concept social capital fits. Grenfell (2008, p.223) describes how capital demonstrates its power or value as it 'acts to "buy" positioning within the field'. Bourdieu (1986) theorised capital as a resource that existed in three main forms. His first concept was the commonly held notion of economic capital such as the money and assets an individual possesses. Secondly cultural capital, Bourdieu describes how this exists in different forms it can be an *objectified state* represented by cultural goods such as art and music. Cultural capital can also be in an *institutional state*, an example of this being formal processes of education and systems of recognised qualifications. These aspects of cultural capital can be subtle yet powerful symbolic representations of a person's habitus and Bourdieu described how this can become embodied by 'mannerisms and pronunciations (accents)' (Bourdieu 2000b, p.228). Finally, in his later work

Bourdieu went on to highlight social capital which he referred to as the resources that are inherent within social relations and which serve to generate and transform the other forms of capital.

Field (2003) explains how these forms of capital were described by Bourdieu in a television interview by using the metaphor of a casino. Bourdieu described the casino as a field and the people playing the games with different colour chips are in essence negotiating a way and positioning themselves, in the same way people in social spaces exchange their stocks of human, cultural and social capital to 'buy positioning' in a field. Bourdieu also highlights the existence of privilege in the casino metaphor by describing how some players arrive at the game with larger stacks of chips than others, which in essence they have inherited from their family. Bourdieu (1990, p.66) describes how these interactions and exchanges of capital in the field are not always based on stark rational choices instead he argues that they are often based on an implicit and tacit logic which he describes as a 'feel for the game'. This 'feel for the game' can be broken down by understanding the 'feel' as being habitus and the game being the exchange of capital in the field. The following chapter explores how the existing literature frames young people's interactions with capital and takes a particular focus on social capital.

Theory of practice

Bourdieu (1977) warns against looking at social practices in isolation without acknowledging the interplay between structures (field), dispositions (habitus) and power (capital). For Bourdieu (1984), his key concepts are interrelated and represent a social theory that focuses on social practices. In order to illustrate this he devised the following equation that he referred to as a theory of practice:-

$$\underline{Habitus (capital) + field = practice.}$$

Applying the equation in this study acknowledges that young people's lives are influenced by systems of dispositions (*habitus*) and stocks of different forms of capital, which determine their position in fields and influence the social actions and practices they participate in. For example, the public care system is located within the bureaucratic field that has a structuring effect on young people in foster care. On a practical level, the field determines where the young people live and grow up and influences their day to day routine. Adopting Bourdieu's approach also frames a reality where young people's *habitus* has been structured and influenced through their past experiences that combined with their access to capital, is structuring their present circumstances which subsequently influences their future life chances.

Grenfell and James (1998) highlight that the key concepts of *habitus*, field and capital are the basis of structuralist constructivism, which underpins Bourdieu's epistemological position. Bourdieu developed this epistemology as an alternative to what he viewed as the distinct dualist positions in the social sciences of post-modern constructivism and positivist objectivity. The following quotation from Bourdieu (1977, p.3) reinforces this point by explaining that his concepts are intended to provide 'a science of dialectical relations between objective structures...and the subjective dispositions within which these structures are actualised and which tend to reproduce them'.

Bourdieu (1977, p.77) argued against the categorisation of his work and stated 'the most striking of misunderstandings regarding my work comes from the fact that the reading of the lector is an end in itself, not in order to do something with them but in order to gloss them by relating them to other texts'. This quotation highlights a point that Bourdieu made throughout his work that the concepts he developed are intended for use and to act as tools for empirical study in order to gain understandings of social phenomena. Lane (2000, p.194) states 'the greatest compliment one can

pay a thinker like Bourdieu is, of course, precisely to take up his ideas and concepts and attempt to apply them in new areas of enquiry.' Reay (1998) applied the concepts to empirical study in to the social practices within primary schools in the UK. Reay discovered that the mother's engagement and interaction with the school differed in ways that she states were attributable to differences in their habitus and the different kinds of capital that they held. Reay (1998) discovered that this led to some of the parents not having the right 'currency in the particular field'. It is in this context that Bourdieu's conceptual apparatus is considered in this thesis, as both a theoretical and analytical device to explore and explain understandings of the habitus of young people in foster care and the ways in which they interact within fields to generate and utilise their stocks of capital whilst focusing in particular to the ways they access social capital.

Chapter 2 Social Capital

The aim of this research was to explore young people's experiences of foster care by utilising the concept of social capital as an analytical framework. This overall research aim was expressed in the form of the following research question.

Do young people in foster care engage in practices within their social networks that enable them to maintain and build their access to social capital and if so how?

In order to explore this research question in detail, five objectives are developed in this chapter, which are based on the emerging themes from a review of the social capital literature. The objectives are presented at the end of each thematic subsection in the chapter and then restated together towards the end of the chapter. Before these themes are discussed the chapter begins with an overview of the concepts development and its use in the social sciences.

Social capital in context

The concept of social capital forms the central tenet of this study's theoretical and analytical framework. Literature on social capital has grown considerably in recent years and has been described as one of the most widely used concepts in the contemporary social sciences (Field 2003; Fine 2001). Halpern (2005) qualifies the prominence of the concept by explaining that the term was used in over 500 journal articles in 2004. The popularity of the concept does not seem to have abated and its use in 2014 seems to have increased significantly. A topic search on Web of Science revealed the term 'social capital' was evident in the topics and keywords of over 1700 articles. The number of these articles that specifically relate the concept to children and young people is 62. Its application by scholars of childhood has previously been identified as limited and has been highlighted as a gap in the current social capital literature (Whiting & Harper 2003; Leonard 2005).

However, the concept has spread across a range of disciplines from geography (Pultar et al. 2010), to economics (Dasgupta et al. 2011), and business management (Lindstrand et al. 2011). Although there is a diverse range of disciplines that have applied the concept, they often share a focus on acknowledging the work of the 'key central founding theorists- Pierre Bourdieu, James Coleman and Robert Putnam' (Field 2003, p.1). For example, a number of empirical studies that utilise social capital locate their contribution to the literature by aligning their approach to the work of one of the key theorists above (Morrow 2001b; Hampshire & Matthijsse 2010) or by adopting a critical synthesis that highlights the strengths of the differing conceptualisations for application in the context of their own field of study (Schaefer-Mcdaniel 2004; Weller 2006).

Bourdieu, Coleman and Putnam share a broad definition of social capital that 'differs slightly' (Kawachi et al. 2008, p.176) with each promoting a concept that represents theoretically the almost tacit understanding that a person's social networks are a resource and hold value. However, despite their definitional similarities they also represent approaches towards social capital that vary significantly with distinct theoretical underpinnings (Morrow 1999; Field 2003). The focus of this chapter is to undertake a review of the literature on social capital and highlight themes as they relate to this study. These themes are critically analysed in this chapter in two ways, firstly, in relation to the work of the key social capital theorists (Bourdieu 1986; Coleman 1988; Putnam 2001) and secondly, the subsequent literature that has applied the concept to empirical study in order to gain understandings of young people's experiences. Social capital's usefulness as an analytical tool to explore young people's lives forms part of the enquiry and it is an important theoretical contribution of the thesis.

Conceptual roots

The fundamental idea underpinning social capital is that the social connections amongst individuals, their relationships in their social networks, are a productive resource (Field 2003). Halpern (2005) describes how the concept of social capital highlights the benefits of social networks. Halpern (2005, p.3) argues that this concept is not a 'ground breaking discovery' as these benefits are proposed in the works of the earliest scholars such as Aristotle. Portes (1998) highlights how the benefits of social networks are also present in the work of the founders of the discipline of sociology. For example, Durkheim (Durkheim & Simpson 1951) argued that group living benefitted an individual's mental health and this he argued was evidenced through more socially connected communities having lower suicide rates than more disparate communities. Even earlier, in his study of class, Marx (1867) also recognised the power of relationships amongst individuals in social groups when he made the distinction about a class that was atomised and 'in-its-self' compared to a class that was mobilised and effective 'for-its-self'. Despite social capital's similarities to existing theoretical approaches Field (2003) argues that it does have value as it recognises relationships as a factor in explaining structures and behaviours.

Hanifan (1916) has been widely cited (Putnam 2001; Field 2003; Halpern 2005) as the first to use the term social capital in a published article, where he explored the relationship between a rural American school and the wider community. Hanifan (1916, p.130) differentiated social capital from other commonly held notions of capital such as money and assets by describing it as 'that in life which tends to make the most tangible substances count for most in the daily lives of people, namely goodwill, fellowship, mutual sympathy and social intercourse among a group of individuals and families who make up a social unit.' Farr (2004) argues that the development of the concept of social capital pre-dates Hanifan and stems from a group of progressive reformers in the United States (US) who were a key influence in

Hanifan's work. One such reformer was Dewey who was a philosopher with an interest in education and a key proponent of the term social capital, reportedly using it in his speeches (Farr 2004). Dewey had an active interest in social justice and he was an active participant in community campaigns for women's voting rights and the wider civil rights movements. These conceptual roots suggest that the initial values underpinning social capital, with the progressive social activists of the 1900's, appear to be congruent with those of modern social work. For example, Butler and Drakeford (2005) describe social work as a social project that at its core has values of social justice. Social justice is also prominent in the International Federation of Social Work's definition of the profession where they state 'human rights and social justice serve as the motivation and justification for social work action' (IFSW 2002). The emergence of the concept of social capital in contemporary social work is evidenced by Dominelli (2010) who has recently called for the concept to be applied in practice as a way of empowering communities and challenging oppression. Therefore, this apparent link between the concept's inception with progressive reformers in the 1900's and its recent use by modern social work scholars represents an initial point of justification to use social capital as a tenet of the conceptual framework for this study.

Themes of social capital

In order to build this justification further, the following section of this chapter considers the key themes of social capital that emerged from a review of the literature. The following four themes are discussed: (1) Social networks; (2) Typologies of social capital: bridging and bonding; (3) Participation; (4) Reciprocity; (5) Sense of belonging. These themes have been selected due to their recurrence in the literature in two ways. Firstly, they present, in varying degrees, as key in the works of the writers who have attempted to develop the concept theoretically (Bourdieu 1986; Coleman 1988; Putnam 2001; Schaefer-Mcdaniel 2004; Whiting & Harper 2003; Portes

1998). Secondly, they present as being central in the work of researchers who have operationalised the concept for empirical study, in particular with young people (Leonard 2005; Morrow 2001a; Morrow 2001b; Holland et al. 2007; Weller 2006; Hampshire & Matthijsse 2010). As previously discussed these themes form the research objectives.

Social networks

The key theorists share the view that social capital is produced and maintained within social networks (Bourdieu 1986; Coleman 1988; Putnam 2001). For example, Coleman (1988) who has been widely cited in the literature as being instrumental in the move to conceptualise social capital in order to operationalise it for empirical research, studied social networks (Field 2003; Farr 2004; Harper 2002). Coleman (1988) examined social networks and in particular how they impact on the educational attainment of children and young people. It is within the network that Coleman (1988, p.98) identified the resource of social capital, which he defined as 'a variety of different entities, with two elements in common: they all consist of some aspect of social structure, and they facilitate certain actions of actors whether personal or corporate actors within the structure. Like other forms of capital, social capital is productive, making possible the achievement of certain ends that in its absence would not be possible.' Coleman's (1988) analysis of his empirical evidence suggests that the stock of social capital within a child's social network is a significant factor in their educational attainment and achievement. Coleman's research focused on young people who dropped out of high school; he found that the 'drop-out' rates in Catholic high schools were three times less than in public high schools. Coleman suggested that this was influenced by the communal nature of the Catholic schools that had strong social networks that connected parents, teachers and students. These strong networks also had what Coleman referred to as having a degree of closure, and explained that a child in the school knew there was no point in truanting or skipping a class because someone in their social network would

find out. For example, if a teacher knew you missed class then your parents knew and vice versa. Coleman concluded that developing a shared norm that values education amongst parents and teachers results in children recognising this norm and in turn leads to them valuing education, which brings about a subsequent improvement in their educational achievements.

Bourdieu (1992, p.119) defines social capital as 'The sum of resources, actual or virtual, accrued to an individual or a group by virtue of possessing a durable network of more or less institutionalised relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition.' For example, in illustrating this idea Bourdieu (1992) described how membership of a golf club was an indicator of social capital as being a member had its perks and offered access to resources. Furthermore, it provided enhanced business contacts and links. From a Bourdieusien perspective, it takes work to generate and maintain capital, in all its forms. In relation to the acquisition and mobilisation of social capital, Bourdieu stated that it requires an "unceasing sociability... a continuous series of exchanges in which recognition is endlessly affirmed and reaffirmed" (Bourdieu 1986, p.250).

Bourdieu (1986) argued that social capital is inseparable from economic and cultural capital and described how these differing forms of capital are 'fungible' and therefore have an exchange value. For example, social capital in the form of business contacts from the golf club can be exchanged in to business that subsequently generates economic capital. Leonard (2005) argues that the exchange aspect of capital is problematic when applying the concept to children as capital exchanges, particularly economic exchanges such as cash and banking transactions, are often adult processes that children do not fully participate in. Leonard (2005, p.612) argues that in applying Bourdieu's forms of capital to children and young people it may be beneficial to consider social capital as having a direct 'use value' for them. Therefore, despite children being constrained in their agency and their ability to convert their social capital in to other forms of capital

they can use it for the benefit of friendship and emotional support. Putnam's (2001) notion of bonding social capital offers a way of understanding the potential use or benefit of social capital beyond that of exchange.

Typologies of social capital: bridging and bonding

A key aspect of Putnam's theory that has subsequently been utilised widely in research is his typologies of social capital, the notions of *bonding* and *bridging* social capital. Putnam (2001, p.23) describes how bonding social capital refers to a resource within close social networks that acts as a 'sociological super glue' and provides a sense of security and community cohesion. Putnam (2001, p.23) describes how bonding social capital is valuable as it helps people 'get by' in everyday life. Bonding social capital is accessed through close connections within a homogenous social network; for example kinship groups or people from the same ethnic or even socioeconomic background. Bridging social capital on the other hand, refers to resources within relationships that help people to 'get on'; Putnam (2001, p.23) refers to it as 'sociological WD-40'. Stocks of bridging capital enables people to bridge out from their homogenous groups and provide benefit in the form of access to resources of other societal groups. Putnam highlights that bridging capital can be in the form of strong ties between people across a network but it can also refer to weak ties in a social network, for example distant friends or colleagues. Putnam refers to the social network theory of Granovetter (1973) who describes how weak ties can be a valuable resource particularly in facilitating the possibility of social mobility. For example, a weak tie outside of your homogenous social network could be beneficial when searching for employment opportunities, which therefore, serves as a source of bridging social capital.

These typologies of capital have been used in social capital research with young people (Weller 2006; Holland et al. 2007; Hampshire &

Matthijsse 2010) and they have been described as offering a potentially useful point of conceptualisation in order to analyse relationships in social networks (Hampshire & Matthijsse 2010). Putnam (2001) acknowledges that bridging and bonding is not an either/or categorisation and is therefore it is difficult to delineate and categorise a certain relationship within a person's network as either bridging or bonding. However, despite the difficulties Weller (2006) argues it is useful to consider these typologies as a heuristic, particularly during data analysis. Leonard (2005) provides a useful example of the application of bonding and bridging typologies in their study with young people who lived in disadvantaged areas in Northern Ireland. Leonard found high levels of bonding social capital, typified by close kinship networks, but also a distinct lack of bridging capital which young people felt was constraining them in their community. Leonard highlighted how the community's close bonds were drawn along sectarian divisions and young people gained bonding social capital through connections with sectarian gangs. This highlights what Putnam (2001, p.23) refers to as the 'dark side' of social capital where bonds in a social networks can have 'malevolent, anti-social purposes'. Putnam offers the Ku Klux Klan and the mafia as examples of this dark side of social capital. Leonard (2005) identified employment as a key arena where young people in the community utilised and generated social capital. For example, bonding social capital helped children find jobs such as babysitting for family or paper rounds passed on from friends. Leonard (2005, p.618) describes how this employment enabled some young people 'to remain longer in the educational system because of their earning ability'. Leonard then went on to explain how these education opportunities developed young people's cultural capital and also their social capital, by widening their networks and developing bridging social capital outside of their community.

Fine (2010, p.86) is critical of Putnam's (2001) conceptualisation of social capital however and describes how it presents as a notion of 'collective self-help' were people within disadvantaged communities can overcome

structural inequalities by gaining access to bridging social capital. Bourdieu's (1986) approach to the concept, which is employed in this study, counters this criticism as it fundamentally differs to the other key writers on the concept, as in essence it focuses on power and the potential for social capital to reinforce inequality. For example, Bourdieu (1986) describes social capital as a form of capital which facilitates unequal access to resources and enables society's elites to maintain power. Bourdieu argued that social capital was a positive resource for the privileged and a negative for the excluded. Bourdieu (1997, p. 51) acknowledges that social capital is more effective when it is backed up with cultural and economic capital; Bourdieu refers to this as the 'multiplier effect'. The following quotation from Morrow (1999, p.760) highlights how this critical viewpoint could be beneficial when studying the social networks of disadvantaged communities.

'There is a danger that 'social capital' will become part of what might be termed 'deficit theory syndrome', yet another 'thing' or 'resource' that unsuccessful individuals, families, communities and neighbourhoods lack. This is why Bourdieu's notion of capital is a useful way forward, because it is essentially a theory of privilege rather than a theory of inadequacy.'

However, by taking a focus on inequality, Bourdieu's work has also been criticised as it suggests that social capital is an exclusive property of the social networks of the affluent and functions solely to reinforce their social positions (Field 2003). As Field (2003) highlights, Bourdieu's focus on inequality fails to acknowledge that social capital can also be a valuable resource in the networks of people throughout society regardless of their economic status, for both the privileged and the disadvantaged. Morrow (1999) argues that Bourdieu's approach presents as a useful heuristic for research with disadvantaged groups as a key point of Bourdieu's formulation is that access to social capital is produced through the practices and processes in social networks. In short, Bourdieu (1986) was concerned

with how social capital worked and what it does. This is evident in the example Bourdieu provided of the golf club membership a network that provides you with valuable social capital in the form of business contacts that in turn can be exchanged for other forms of capital. Leonard (2005, p.609) highlights how Bourdieu's conceptualisation, with a focus on practices, is useful in research specifically with children and young people. She states 'Bourdieu's formulation could usefully illustrate how the micro social worlds of children interact with the wider macro social structure.'

Holland et al. (2007) undertook research using 'social capital as a lens through which to explore transitions, networks and communities in the lives of young people.' The study employed Bourdieu's notion of social capital to acknowledge 'his themes of social justice and inequality' (Holland et al. 2007, p.99). Although they declare themselves as 'critical of Putnam's stance on social capital' (Holland et al. 2007, p.101) they do employ his notions of bridging and bonding and describe them as typologies that are 'fruitful to draw upon'. A key part of their study was to explore how children and young people make the transition from primary to secondary school. The study found that young people 'draw upon their friendship networks as positive resources that enable them to cope with the move' (Holland et al. 2007, p.101). The typologies of bonding and bridging were used to illustrate how young people coped with the transition. For example, Holland et al. (2007, p.102) describe how 'moving school with friends did not mean that children did not make new friends. Indeed, having a stable base of bonds enabled many to bridge out to new friendship'. In relation to the young people in this study their move into foster care was a transition they had to cope with, and part of this included being identified as living in foster care. The findings show the ways they carefully manage the disclosure of their care status within their networks in an attempt to maintain their bonding social capital. This management of identity will be returned to and discussed in further detail in chapter six.

The social capital conceptualisations of Bourdieu (1988), Coleman (1988) and Putnam (2001) have been criticised for the way they frame children and young people's experiences and interactions in their social networks and the ways they access social capital (Leonard 2005; Holland 2007; Morrow 1999). For example, Leonard (2005) argues that the key writers largely ignore young people's accounts and when they are included children are portrayed as passive within their social networks and recipients of their parent's social capital. Holland et al. (2007) challenges this passive view and proposes the opposite that parents can in fact benefit from their children's social capital. Holland et al. (2007, p.99) states 'much parental social capital rests on the social networks built around the interaction of children'. Raffo and Reeves (2000) acknowledge the competence of young people and they explored the ways that disadvantaged youth in Manchester make the transition between school and work. They highlight the active role that young people play in managing their relationships in their networks and how in turn this enables them to access social capital, which can assist in the move to employment. In this study, in order to explore whether young people in foster care are actively managing their relationships, research objective one was developed, which asks the following question.

Do young people in foster care manage their relationships in their networks?

Research objective two relates to the typologies of social capital discussed earlier in this section. This objective was developed in order to explore whether young people in foster care are engaging practices that could be understood as accessing bonding and bridging social capital. Therefore, research objective two asks the following question.

Do young people in foster care engage in practices that enable them to access bonding and bridging social capital?

Participation

In 'Making Democracy Better' Putnam (1994) studied how the economies of northern regions of Italy appeared to be developing at a faster rate than regions in the south. Putnam argues that these differences are down to the existence of more social capital in the northern regions; social capital that was evidenced through the existence of a large number of active community organisations. Putnam describes that in Tuscany, an area with a fast developing economy, a large number of organisations, such as choirs and football teams existed; by contrast the region of Calabria had fewer community organisations and their economy was developing slower. Putnam argued that the local governments were organised similarly and each reflected a similar range of ideological beliefs, concluding that the key differential was the amounts of participation in community organisations, which he described as an indicator of social capital. From this initial observation in northern Italy, Putnam (2000) went on to examine how social capital has been declining across the United States (US). Putnam focused on participation rates across US society which he describes as a key indicator of a community's social capital. Putnam illustrates his argument of declining social capital in the US by describing a golden era of high social capital in the 1950's that he characterises as a time of socially connected communities that associated together, trusted each other and mutually assisted each other through acts of reciprocity. Putnam describes this as a time where people in American communities were more connected; they engaged in formal leisure activities they played bridge together in clubs and bowled together in organised league. In contrast, he goes on to describe a modern television age of declining participation with people working longer hours, associating less and helping each other less. Putnam argues that modern Americans have become less connected and that subsequently they have less social capital. Putnam illustrates this by describing how people are now shunning participatory sport leagues and as the title of his bestselling book suggests they prefer to go 'Bowling Alone' (Putnam 2001)

Harper (2001) highlights that Putnam's focus on declining participation rates misses the possibility that a wealth of leisure opportunities have sprung up since the 1950's so reasons that the apparent decline Putnam observes might simply be a natural shift to other forms of activity. This is a point that Putnam alludes to when he considers how young people interact with their community, 'Perhaps the younger generation today is no less engaged than their predecessors, but engaged in new ways' (Putnam 2000, p.26). However, Weller (2006) argues that Putnam fails to investigate this potential shift, toward different forms of engagement, as systematically as his search for participative decline. Harper (2001) also identified this as a limitation and argued that Putnam's quantitative methodological approach and claims are limited. Harper posits that Putnam's research actually measured changing patterns of participation and not, as he concluded, declining. Indeed, Bourdieu (1992) has described how the internationalisation of theories is potentially problematic as it has the potential to miss contextual nuances and cultural specificities. Therefore, applying the notion of declining civic traditions from the US to the civic traditions of the UK is problematic; this is a point that is reinforced by Harper (2001, p.3) who states 'the decline in social capital in America recorded by Putnam is not mirrored in the UK. Some civic organisations have declined but other forms of engagement are rising...'. These processes of internationalisation can also result in social policies being borrowed from one cultural setting to another. Thoburn & Courtney (2011) highlight how foster care policies that seemingly work in one country are often adopted in another and this is problematic as it can miss cultural nuances. For example, foster care is very different in the United States (US) where children are predominantly placed in their kinship groups, compared to the UK, where children are predominantly placed with carers with whom they have no pre-existing relationship.

A recurring criticism of social capital's key writers' is that they do not adequately account for the ways in which marginalised groups participate in

the practices and processes of social capital. For example, Leonard (2005) considers that issues of gender are neglected in the literature and as such an anti-feminist stance permeates the current theorising. Edwards (2004) describes how the key writers on the concept fail to acknowledge that issues of gender inequality exist, which may result in women being impaired in their access and ability to utilise social capital. Morrow (1999, p.751) highlights how social capital theory ignores the participation of women and their key role in the generation of social capital, writing there is an 'invisibility of women's work in creating or sustaining social networks and hence social capital'. Edwards (2004, p.8) also argues 'the divisive and oppressive side of the 'traditional' family and gender relations, such as an unequal division of labour and domestic abuse, is ignored'.

Therefore, in this thesis it was important to reflect on issues of gender in the findings and to analyse whether there were any apparent gendered differences. For example, by highlighting differing ways that male and female participants engaged in practices in their networks that enabled them to maintain and build their access to social capital. This was considered throughout the analysis; however, it will become apparent in chapter 7, where findings illustrate the practices of memorialisation that the young people engaged in, which appeared to be evidently different for these boys and girls.

Leonard (2005, p. 610) describes how in Coleman's work a 'highly conservative anti-feminist stance permeates his notion of family life'. This is evident in his empirical work into family life, where he claimed 'the most prominent element of structural deficiency in modern families is the single parent family' (Coleman 1988, p.111). Whereas, Edwards (2004, p.10) highlights that 'theories of late modernity pose family diversity as pioneering brave new forms of association and egalitarian relationships'. Edwards (2004, p.5) goes on to call for reflexivity in the application of the concept of social capital in order to 'take on board contemporary theorising

around family life and relationships.’ Coleman (1988) and Putnam (2001) have also been criticised for ignoring issues of race and ethnicity and adopting an ethnocentric approach. For example, Edwards (2004) argues that Coleman’s accounts of deficient family forms neglects to acknowledge how diverse family forms are present in different cultures. However, despite these limitations Edwards (2004, p.16) acknowledges the heuristic potential of the concept but ‘calls for greater reflexivity in the use of social capital, intellectually and politically’. Edwards (2004) also acknowledges the potential of Bourdieu’s (1988) conceptualisation to address these issues as it is grounded in inequality with a focus on power.

Therefore, given these criticisms it was important for this research to reflect on the influence that culture and race had on the findings. The participants in this study were predominantly from white British backgrounds with one young person having African Caribbean heritage and another having dual heritage being white British and African Caribbean. It was especially important to ensure that normative assumptions privileging certain family forms were reflected upon and challenged in the analysis, as entry into foster care has meant that all of these young people no longer fit within any notion of a traditional family form. Although these issues were considered during the analysis it would have been challenging to present detailed cultural differences in the findings, given the small and culturally unrepresentative sample. Therefore, discussion about race and culture does not factor in any great detail in the following sections of the thesis.

In relation to the participation of young people, Weller (2006) undertook a study on the Isle of Wight using a social capital approach. Weller’s research highlighted how adult definitions of participation and civic engagement typified by the work of Putnam (2001) were problematic when applied to young people. Weller found young people were far from uninvolved in community matters and found examples of ‘young people that were very socially engaged’ (Hampshire and Matthijsse 2010, p.709). She

provided the example of young people that were instrumental in campaigning successfully for the development of a skateboard park in their community. The campaign involved fund raising and attending civic meetings; Weller (2006, p.567) highlights how this provides an example of how young people 'actively contribute to shaping their communities'. Weller argues that adult concepts of civic engagement require broader and more flexible understandings. Weller (2006, p.572) concluded her report by challenging Putnam's notion of declining social capital amongst young people and stated 'far from Putnam's 'Bowling Alone', 'Skateboarding Together' might be a more valuable starting point for examining teenagers relationship with social capital.' In relation to the young people in this study it is important to acknowledge Wellers (2006) assertion that young people are active participants in their community, socially and civically, however not necessarily in ways obvious to adult researchers who may be using adult norms to inform their analysis. Therefore, this thesis attempted to ensure that the analysis of the young people's participation was grounded in their accounts of their experiences of foster care. Thereby, ensuring the ways that they participate is grounded in the data, negating the possibility of framing their participation in narrow adult definitions.

Furthermore, Putnam's approach has been criticised for failing to acknowledge the impact of power. His theory has been described as a form of 'collective self-help' (Fine 2001, p.86) that infers if people started to participate in their community they could alleviate their social disadvantage and achieve social mobility. For Bourdieu (2000b), participation in society is constrained by fields and he uses the concept of symbolic violence to illustrate this constraint in action. Bourdieu argues that people are influenced by a system of dispositions (*habitus*), which is influenced by their past experiences and their current circumstances. Bourdieu explains that if you are lacking in the right form of capital, be it social, economic or cultural, within a structured social space it can become embodied in your disposition. This ultimately determines how comfortable a person is in participating

within different social spaces and this embodiment becomes evident through a person's body language. Therefore, the capital a person possesses and the influence of habitus can serve as a form of symbolic violence that can constrain a person and dissuade them from even attempting to participate in certain fields. Bourdieu (2000b) describes how this is demonstrated by people when they say things like 'that's not for the likes of me'. This symbolic violence serves to constrain and can determine whether a person feels like 'a fish in water' within a structured social space or 'a fish out of water.' McNay (1999, p.99) explains how this process reproduces inequality as follows:-

'Large-scale social inequalities are established not at the level of direct institutional discrimination but through the subtle inculcation of power relations upon the bodies and dispositions of individuals. This process of corporeal inculcation is an instance of what Bourdieu calls symbolic violence or a form of domination which is exercised upon a social agent with his or her complicity' (McNay 1999, p.99)

For the young people in foster care this is an interesting point of conceptualisation, for example, in relation to their participation in education. Bourdieu (1988) argues that the opportunity to attend university falls in to three categories. Firstly, for some young people attendance at university is expected and there is little doubt that will be attending and will achieve a good degree qualification. Secondly, for some young people attendance at University is a possibility; however, thirdly, for some young people University attendance is just inconceivable. These beliefs serve as forms of symbolic violence and become inscribed in people's dispositions and act as a way of recreating social order with people embodying beliefs and perceiving the inequality that they face is justified. Their position in fields, determined by their habitus and accumulation of capital, has acted to constrain their aspirations and expectations. Therefore, some young people in foster care may have embodied beliefs about certain activities or opportunities such as

‘university is not for the likes of me’ which impairs their ability to participate and build social capital. Participation in education is of particular importance to young people in foster care as the existing research (Stein 2006) suggests that their educational attainment is significantly lower than their non-fostered peers and also on leaving care they face greater risks of becoming socially excluded. For example, Stein (2006, p.274) explains how ‘discourses of social exclusion mean both material disadvantage and marginalisation’ and he describes how ‘within this context international research has shown the high risk of social exclusion for young people leaving care’.

Participation is also an issue that is central to the child rights agenda (UNICEF 1989) and is an increasing feature in policy that relates to children and young people (Williams & Rogers 2014). UNICEF (1989) describe how participation is one of the guiding principles of the convention on children rights. In practice this has resulted in increased attempts to empower children and young people by ensuring they are actively consulted and involved in decisions that affect them. This is of particular relevance to children and young people in care, as there is a focus enshrined in legislation (Children Act 1989), on ensuring young people are supported to participate in the decisions making processes that affect them as individuals. Sinclair and Franklin (2000, p.2) describe how this policy context ‘implies taking account of their wishes and feelings and including the child’s perspective in all matters. This is on-going and requires continuous dialogue but may also be exercised around procedures such as assessment, care planning and reviews, child protection conferences, care or adoption proceedings, Family Group Conferences and complaints’. In recent years this policy focus on participation has led to formal mechanisms being established, particularly in the public care setting, in order to facilitate young people’s inclusion in the decision that are made about the services they receive. An example of a fairly recent policy that has participation at its core is Every Child Matters (DCSF 2003). However, it is important to recognise that these mechanisms to

increase participation may potentially result in young people being coerced to participate in ways deemed appropriate by adults. The social capital literature has highlighted ways in which young people participate proactively in their communities, not just in ways facilitated by adults but on their own terms. For example, the ways young people actively campaigned for the construction of a skatepark, which was highlighted in Weller's study (2006).

This thesis examines participation in relation to young people in foster care and in order to do this, research objective three was developed that asked the following question.

In what ways are young people in foster care participating in socially networked activities?

Reciprocity

Putnam (2001) argues that the existence of trust and acts of reciprocity between individuals demonstrates that a person's social networks can be a valuable resource, and as such they are a form of 'capital'. Putnam describes how acts of reciprocity are a key indicator of social capital, where people help each other for no apparent exchange or short term gain, but in the belief that in the future somebody may help them when they are in need. For Putnam (2001, p.19), reciprocity is a key aspect of the concept that he includes in the following definition; 'Social capital refers to the connections among individuals- social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them'. Putnam describes how acts of reciprocity occur throughout the strata of society and he argues that this is evidence of social capital's existence, which counters a critique of Bourdieu's work (Field 2003) that social capital is a resource mainly for the privileged.

Coleman (1988, p.102) also acknowledged reciprocity as an important facet of social capital and explained that reciprocal transactions are helpful acts undertaken in order to accrue 'credit slips' for future exchange. The

theoretical basis of Coleman's (1990) work stems from an interest in promoting an economic approach to the social sciences that aimed to introduce empirical rigour to social theory (Fine 2004; Field 2003). Fine (2004) is critical of social capital and argues that the concept is evidence of the field of economics trying to colonise the social sciences in an attempt to boil everything down in society to a measurable exchange. However, the following quotation from Kawachi et al. (2008, p.86) highlights how the concept can be utilised with the intention of achieving the opposite:-

"Some scholars have objected to the use of the term social "capital," arguing that the language implies an economic basis for social exchange. In fact our intent is exactly the opposite, i.e., to remind economists that not all forms of capital involve mercantile exchange" (Kawachi et al. 2008, p.86)

Fine (2004) describes how Coleman is linked with Rational Choice Theory (RCT), which proposes that people in society are motivated to act primarily for the benefit of their own self-interest (Field 2000). Coleman used the concept of social capital in order to support RCT and explained that rational actors choose to cooperate with others in order to gain social capital. According to Coleman people cooperate for the accumulation of social capital and it is an unintended response in peoples' quest to fulfil their own self-interests. Mitzal (2000) criticises RCT as it dismisses notions of altruism, cooperation and benevolent acts of kindness in favour of rational actors operating in a clinical, calculating manner. However, Field (2004, p.140) highlights the potential strength of this approach when he argues that "rational choice theories of social capital should not be dismissed out of hand. Apart from anything else, they provide a useful counterbalance to those who overestimate the importance of structure and downplay the role of agency." Coleman's approach therefore counters a criticism of Bourdieu's work for being deterministic and neglecting the potential beneficial role social capital has for people across the social hierarchy. However, it could

also be argued that Coleman's focus purely on an individual's ability to make rational choices when it comes to the processes of social capital negates the powerful influence of privilege and structural inequality. For example, Coleman (1990, p302) frames social capital as a benevolent and productive resource and describes how "social capital is a property of social structures and social relations that helps to facilitate social action and get things done".

Berridge (2007) argues that affluent families strategize for the advantage of their children. For example, they encourage reciprocity in relationships with high achieving friends and discourage relationships with peers experiencing difficulties. They also arrange tutors, social activities and work experience opportunities. In short families, who have the resources, utilise their advantageous social networks for the benefit of their children. For Bourdieu, (1998, p.71) the family are central to the practices of social capital and he described how 'among executives, the family plays a considerable role not only in the transmission but also in the management of economic heritage, especially through business alliances which are often family alliances'. With this apparent power, or capital, inherent within social networks Berridge (2007 p.6) goes on to argue that 'If society genuinely wants looked after children to do well at school the state needs to match some of these middle class strategies'. Bourdieu's conceptualisation of social capital highlights how the inherent power of social capital has the potential to go beyond a field such as school, to be advantageous in different fields.

Leonard (2005) explored ways in which young people interacted with reciprocity in their social networks. In her research on young people's experiences of growing up in a disadvantaged neighbourhood in Belfast, Leonard (2005, p.615) found examples of teenagers who did 'odd jobs for elderly neighbours' and described the experience of a 15 year old who ran errands; when the researcher asked how much he charged for doing this the boy replied 'Don't be stupid she is an old doll. I wouldn't charge her money, sure she hasn't got any!' Leonard's (2005) example provides an insight into

the potential ways young people interact with acts of reciprocity and how they participate and cooperate in their communities. Within a context of dominant discourses that highlight young people's involvement in anti-social acts, reciprocity is a potentially important area to explore as it allows the possibility to gain valuable insights in to the ways in which young people are participating in their social networks in cooperative/ pro-social ways.

Bourdieu (1998) highlights the ways capital in all its forms serves to reproduce inequality and how the practices and processes of social capital, such as reciprocal acts, are key in facilitating this reproduction. In order to explore this in the context of young people's experiences of foster care, research objective four was developed, which asked the following question.

Are young people in foster care engaging in practices of reciprocity within their social networks?

Sense of belonging

Putnam frames social capital as a community resource and he argues that a community that is rich in participation with people helping each other in reciprocal acts is rich in social capital. This is an area where Putnam's (2000) view of social capital differs significantly to Bourdieu (1988) and Coleman (1988) both of whom frame social capital as potentially being both a family or network resource. Putnam's approach has been criticised for 'conceptual stretch' as he attempts to measure social capital much more broadly on regional and national levels. Critics argue that this 'conceptual stretch'; where social capital became a measurable attribute of the community, has meant the concept has diverged and the term now means all things to all men (Portes 1998; Fine 2001). The following quotation from Portes & Landolt (2000) highlights this criticism clearly and how making this stretch is problematic:-

“Social Capital as a property of cities or nations is qualitatively distinct from its individual version... In one sentence, social capital is an asset of intact families; in the next, it is an attribute of networks of traders; and in the following, it becomes the explanation of why entire cities are well governed and economically flourishing.” (Portes & Landolt 2000, p.7)

Despite the apparent limitation of stretching the site of social capital Schaefer-McDaniel (2004, p.9) argues for a formulation that recognises it as both an ‘individual asset and a community asset’. In the social capital literature community is often viewed in the sense of neighbourhoods such as towns or estates. However, applying these notions of community can be problematic in relation to children and young people. For example, Morrow (1999) explains that young people often identify with a number of communities, which transcend geographic boundaries and are based on factors such as their school, families, their interests and the leisure activities they participate in (Morrow 1999b). Children and young people may also have parents that have separated and live between two different geographic communities, which could present as a potential source of difficulty for young people who may find their loyalties conflicted as a result. In relation to this study the findings that follow will demonstrate how this complexity exists for young people in foster care, who had a sense of belonging to the communities that their birth families live in as well as a sense of belonging to the community their foster placement is in.

Weller (2006) highlights that notions of community need to develop a broader definition when applied to young people. Weller explored with young people what their understanding of community was, and how they described associations based on their own constructed identities. For example, they spoke of distinct groups of Skaters, Bmx’ers, Goths, and Townies. These identities represented homogenous groups to the young people and as such Weller argues that they represented an alternative

understanding of community than just geographic and enabled the young people to express a sense of belonging. Weller (2006, p.568) also went on to explain that 'for teenagers the creation of alternative communities is, in some cases, a reaction to the exclusion they feel in public space and from the wider world'.

Schafer-McDaniel (2004) offers a conceptualisation of social capital for research that promotes an approach that moves away from geographic notions of community towards an approach that pays more attention to a young person's sense of belonging. Her reasoning is that this will provide understandings of how embedded a young person is in their social networks and that this indicates their ability to interact in the practices of social capital. Schafer-McDaniel (2004, p.148) highlight this point with the following quotation 'the underlying assumption is that when young people feel that they belong to a school and/or neighbourhood and have a symbolic attachment to the place, they are more likely to make friends and interact with peers'. Weller (2006, p.568) supports this view and states 'A sense of belonging is an integral part of social capital ... as well as being significant in children's development and identity formation'. Therefore, this thesis adopted this approach and explored how young people in foster care interact with practices and processes that are related to social capital, by looking at their sense of belonging to people and groups within their social networks.

Biehal et al. (2010, p.19) describe how for young people in foster care a sense of belonging is often 'intimately connected with issues of identity, attachment and family loyalty' and they explain:-

'There is little available evidence about the process by which some children achieve at least a sufficient resolution of their complicated feelings about their birth families to enable them to abandon their fantasy of re-joining families who may reject or severely abuse them

and to settle for permanence in another family'. (Biehal et al. 2010, p.19)

The young people's pathways to adulthood have been disrupted by entering care and this has often been compounded with multiple placement breakdowns (Ofsted 2011). The following quotation from Schofield (2003, p.7) further highlights the potential challenge that this presents for children in foster care;

'The familiar questions for all children, 'who am I and where do I belong?' need to be addressed and answered by these children in a way which enables them to move on with their lives. As the foster child sits curled up on the settee watching his new but strange (to him) family get on with their lives around him, his mind is unlikely to be still. Through to adult life, that child will be managing these thoughts and feelings, with new environments providing both anxieties and opportunities.'

Sense of belonging is an aspect of social capital that has potential implications for young people in care given the potential challenges they face with these threats to their social networks. Therefore, this thesis explored whether the participants expressed a sense of belonging and in order to achieve this research objective five was developed, which asks the following question.

Do young people in foster care express a sense of belonging?

Research questions and objectives

In focusing on social capital this study centres on a particular aspect of the young people's experiences in the social world. This is a focus on their relationships and the processes and practices of social capital that are enacted in their interactions within their social networks. The overall aim of the research is to explore social capital in the lives of young people in foster care. The research question is as follows:-

Do young people in foster care engage in practices within their social networks that enable them to maintain and build their access to social capital, and if so how?

The themes of social capital that have been identified in this chapter form the objectives that this study explores. The themes are, social networks, bonding and bridging social capital, participation, reciprocity, and sense of belonging. Therefore, this study examines the following five objectives that are listed below;

(1) Do young people in foster care manage their relationships in their social networks?

(2) Do young people in foster care engage in practice to access bonding and bridging social capital?

(3) In what ways are young people in foster care participating in socially networked activities?

(4) Are young people engaging in practices of reciprocity within their social networks?

(5) Do young people in foster care express a sense of belonging?

A return to the theory: Goffman, stigma and the management of a spoiled identity

During the iterative process of data analysis it was clear that the conceptual framework of the study needed to be developed further to include the concept of stigma. This was necessary as the analysis revealed how, for the participants, being 'in care' served as a challenge to their identity and their ability belong. Their status of being 'in care' held the potential for them to be stigmatized. These challenges that stigma presented had clear implications on how the participants engage in relationships within their social networks so subsequently has a potential impact on how they access social capital. Therefore, in order to fully establish the analytical framework a return to the theory was needed to include an account of stigma.

This concluding section of the chapter presents a discussion of relevant literature on stigma, which includes Goffman's (1964) work on the management of a spoiled identity that is now fifty years old, yet it is still considered a critical text on the topic (Link & Phelan 2001). Goffman's concept of stigma has also been previously utilised in the foster care literature and this will also be discussed in this section. The section concludes with a brief discussion on stigma's synergy with the Bourdieusien social capital framework that is utilised in this study.

Notes on the management of a spoiled identity (Goffman 1964)

Stigma is a term that originated with the ancient Greeks, a stigma was a cut or burn, inflicted upon a person, and it was intended to act as a sign on the body to signify that there was something bad or different about them. The people that were inflicted with these signs were generally, slaves, criminals or traitors. This represents the often common sense understanding of the term stigma, that it is a mark that identifies a person who is in some way discredited. Goffman (1964, p.13) explained how the term goes beyond

this understanding of being a mark, to where stigma is now used to describe the 'disgrace itself rather than the bodily evidence'. For example, the stigma could be a medical condition such as HIV, which is not necessarily a visible mark but can still be used to discredit a person. Goffman describes how this discrediting aspect of stigma, which can result in a person's exclusion, can be embodied as a belief by the person who holds the stigma, which can subsequently impact on their interactions within society. He describes these processes of exclusion with the notions of in-group and out-group alignments. Goffman charts the various ways that those with a stigmatized status attempt to manage their spoiled identity in order to align themselves with the 'normals' so that can try to belong to the in-group. Goffman (1964, p.13) explained how this management of identity can present challenges and impact on the ways that people disclose their stigmatized status:-

'The term stigma and its synonyms conceal a double perspective : does the stigmatized individual assume his differentness is known about already or is evident on the spot, or does he assume it is neither known about by those present nor immediately perceivable by them? In the first case one deals with the plight of the discredited, in the second with that of the discreditable'

Stigma and children in foster care

The challenges that Goffman explained in the quotation above seem to be evident in the existing research that includes accounts of children and young people's experiences of foster care. For example, Ridge and Millar (2000) undertook a study that examined the friendships of children in care and they found that the participants in their study were acutely aware of having a stigma. The children and young people in their study worked hard to manage their identity and these positions of being discredited or discreditable appeared to be keenly felt by the young people. Ridge and Millar (2000, p.168) explain, 'in their responses children showed a keen sense of the social stigma and social difference associated with life in care.

Children reported being singled out and stigmatized. Fears of being identified and labelled as 'care children' permeated their accounts'. Schofield et al (2000, p.78) study of long term foster care also drew on Goffman's theory of stigma. They found that 'most children had been well aware of that sense of being different and the risk of stigma. The child's position as a foster child remains to some extent anomalous and negatively constructed. It is what Goffman called 'a spoiled identity', which can reduce a person from a whole and usual person to a tainted, discounted one'.

The concept of stigma offers important understandings of young people's experiences of foster care, which are also relevant for this study. Stigma is of particular importance because the notions of 'in' and 'out' groups can result in a person belonging or being excluded from a social network. Membership of an in-group has consequences for a person and their ability to build relationships, which subsequently could impact on their ability to access social capital. Therefore, there is a fit between the concepts of stigma and social capital.

Goffman and Bourdieu

There is also a clear synergy between the work of Goffman and Bourdieu that builds further the justification for Goffman's inclusion in the theoretical framework of this study. On his return from his fieldwork for his own PhD study in Algeria, Bourdieu went to the USA and spent time in Pennsylvania studying under Goffman. Goffman reportedly offered Bourdieu a job teaching at the University of Pennsylvania. However Bourdieu was keen to return to France, where he oversaw the translation of Goffman's works into French. After Goffman's death Bourdieu (1983) wrote an obituary in the journal 'Theory, Culture and Society' in which he praised Goffman's contribution to sociology, describing him as the 'discoverer of the infinitely small'. With the respect that Bourdieu had for Goffman it is perhaps unsurprising that Goffman had a major influence on Bourdieu's social theory. Both Goffman and Bourdieu also undertook ethnographic

studies of social phenomena, where Goffman studied the inner workings of the asylums to Bourdieu undertaking extensive fieldwork to examine the notion of kinship amongst the Kabyle people in Algeria. Fundamentally, on a theoretical level, the synergy between each of their bodies of work is their shared concern with how day to day practices are both structured by society and also serve to structure society.

Summary

This chapter has established that social capital is a resource that is generated within social networks and as such people access it through their relationships in their networks. This theory is potentially useful for understanding the experiences of young people in foster care as their entry into public care, with a move from the care of their parents, has potentially served to significantly challenge the stability of their social network at an early age.

The research question and objectives have been developed in order to provide an analytical framework to explore how young people in foster care engage in practices within their social networks to access social capital. However, it is important to acknowledge that the frame is not intended to be used instrumentally as this could constrain the analysis and result in reproducing what Shaw and Holland (2014) refer to as the logic of questionnaires. This is a qualitative thesis that has explored practices that are at times nuanced and complex. Therefore, if the analytical framework was applied too rigidly these complexities and nuances could have been missed. A reflexive approach was taken throughout in order to avoid this, and this is discussed in chapter 4. The iterative return to the analytical framework and the inclusion of the concept of stigma is evidence of how an attempt was made to ensure the data analysis was not forced or constrained by the framework.

Part 2 Research Design

The second part of the thesis provides an account of the research design and the qualitative methods employed to explore the theory of social capital through the life experiences of young people in foster care. The following two chapters provide an overall explanation and justification for the methodological choices that were made for this study. Hakim (2000) describes research design as the point where research questions are turned in to research projects. White (2009) explains that this is a process where a researcher begins to explore how a research question can be answered and chooses the methods that are required to gather the appropriate evidence. In chapter 3, the methodological approach is presented. Chapter 4 focuses on research processes and describes in detail how the study was conducted.

Chapter 3 Research Methods

This research adopts an interpretivist ontological position that employs qualitative methods. In this chapter these methodological choices are critically discussed and justified. The chapter concludes with a specific discussion of semi-structured interviews and the task-based research methods (Punch 2002) of eco-maps and photo elicitation that were utilised in the study.

Ontological and epistemological underpinnings

Debate exists in the social sciences about the ‘proper approach to social research’, and the most appropriate methodology to investigate social phenomena (Sayer 1992, p.119). These debates that centre on differing ways of knowing and different types of knowledge are epistemological. Potter (2000b, p.242) explains ontology as the “enquiry in to the nature of being”. Ontological debates originated with the earliest scholars and philosophers, for example, Veatch (1974) explained how Aristotle explored the creation of knowledge by questioning what counts as evidence.

In contemporary social science research ontological debates predominantly centre on the differences between quantitative and qualitative research strategies (Bryman 2008). Quantitative research typically relates to an objective ontology and is generally associated with the epistemological position of positivism, which is an approach that dominates the theoretical underpinnings of the natural sciences (Hughes & Sharrock 2007). Positivist research searches for measurable evidence in an attempt to uncover and explain the causes of phenomena. Positivist social research aims to study aspects of society and human behaviour with the intention of providing an explanation of *why* something is happening. In essence, positivist research attempts to search for the *causes* of a problem (Denzin 1992). This is generally undertaken with statistical analysis and the

measurement of variables in order to attempt to identify significant and influential factors.

In contrast to positivist epistemological approaches Denzin (1992) describes how research with interpretivist epistemology is not attempting to answer *why* but instead attempts to explore *how* something happens. Interpretivist research, attempts to gather and analyse rich contextualised data (Corbin & Strauss 2008). However, Bourdieu (1977) argues debates that centre on objectivity *versus* subjectivity that often propose a quantitative and qualitative divide need not be an 'either or' scenario. Tashakkori and Teddlie (2010) indicate how this rejection of either/or is becoming more evident in practice with an increasing number of research projects adopting a mixed methods approach including both quantitative and qualitative elements.

Bourdieu (1977) argues that the key factor in choosing an ontological position in research practice is choosing a strategy and a methodology that is the most appropriate approach to explore the specific research question. Bourdieu (1992) argues in research design the 'construction of the object' to be studied is the process that leads to which methods to employ for empirical study, rather than choosing a particular method because it is viewed as providing superior evidence. This is demonstrated in Bourdieu's (1984) own research in to class distinction, where he carried out qualitative ethnographic work, quantitative surveys, and the analysis of secondary statistical data sets.

In this thesis the research methods have been determined by establishing the most appropriate way to examine the constructed object of study. The aim of this research was to explore the following question.

Do young people in foster care engage in practices within their social networks that enable them to maintain and build their access to social capital, and if so how?

The Bourdieusian approach to social capital that is central to this study's conceptual framework takes a clear focus on the practices and

processes that people engage in within social networks. Therefore, in order to explore the research question and the subsequent objectives a qualitative methodology was chosen. This qualitative methodology enabled an exploration of young people's interactions within their social networks with their families, peers and communities, which subsequently highlights how they are preserving, maintaining and building their access to social capital.

The choice of a qualitative approach is also supported by a growing consensus within the social capital literature that relates to young people; which suggests the concept's greatest value is as an analytical device in qualitative study (Morrow 2001; Holland 2001; Schaefer-McDaniel 2004). This point is also reinforced by one of the key writers on social capital, Coleman (1988), who after undertaking quantitative research using the concept suggested its worth lies in qualitative study. Qualitative research is also used widely in the field of social work research; it has been described as a methodological approach that fits with social work practice (Gilgun 1984; Gould and Shaw 2001). In fact Gilgun (1994, p.115) describes how qualitative research fits with social work like a '*Hand in Glove*'. This is evident when one considers how a qualitative researcher tries to uncover and understand social phenomena by examining people's interpretation of their experiences. This description has similarities to the ways that social workers attempt to undertake assessments in practice. Furthermore, Denzin and Lincoln (2011, p.3) describe qualitative research as 'a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. It consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible'. Again this illustrates what Shaw and Gould (2001) draw attention to as a natural synergy between qualitative research and social work practice. They cite the example of how a practice assessment can involve, interviewing people, gathering detailed data and analysing the findings, all of which are activities that are employed in this qualitative thesis. Padgett (1998) however states that it is important to acknowledge the difference between practice and research for ethical reasons. For example, social work practice aims to directly improve the

situations of people receiving the service in a timely manner, as opposed to research, which does not directly aim to improve the situations of research participants within a given timescale.

Semi-structured interviews and task based methods

The qualitative data for this study was generated using task- based methods (Punch 2002) across two semi-structured interviews with young people in foster care. Burgess (1984) describes semi-structured qualitative interviews as ‘conversations with a purpose’. Hemming (2008, p.153) describes how ‘generally they start from a number of predetermined questions or topics, but then adopt a flexible approach for discussion with the interviewee’. This approach was followed in this study and a semi-structured interview schedule (Appendix 1) was devised with a range of areas and possible questions to cover during the conversation with the young people. The purpose of using the semi-structured interview schedule was to provide a framework to specifically explore the research questions while having sufficient flexibility to follow relevant areas of interest that the young people may raise during the interviews. Kvale (1996, p.1) argues the ‘qualitative research interview attempts to understand the world from the subjects’ point of view to unfold the meaning of people’s experiences to uncover their lived world prior to scientific explanation.’ This is the aim of the study, to uncover the lived experiences of young people in foster care and the concept of social capital guides this exploration as well as providing a framework for data analysis. However, the qualitative semi-structured nature of the interviews also allows the flexibility for the young people to share their experiences and points of view that are important to them. The semi-structured schedule was developed initially through pilot interviews with my own family and friends before being shown to a consultation group of young people in care for their input. By undertaking pilot interviews with my own family and friends it provided me the opportunity to practice my interview techniques, to develop the schedule and practice the process of

working with someone to complete an eco-map. This was of benefit and meant that when I initially met with the young people I was familiar with the tools and techniques I was using. This enabled me to begin gathering useable data from the first pilot interviews that I completed with two young people in foster care. After these two pilots I began the substantive period of data collection.

Interviews with children and young people

Hemming (2008) highlights how power differentials may negatively influence the interview process with children and young people. Westcott and Littleton (2005) describe how this may become evident with the emergence of a model of teacher initiation-child response-teacher feedback, a process they argue that children expect from adults. Punch (2002, p.7) explains that children and young people 'are not used to expressing their views freely or being taken seriously by adults because of their position in an adult dominated society'. Hill (1997, p.180) suggests that researchers should attempt to 'maximise children's ability to express themselves at the point of data-gathering; enhancing their willingness to communicate and the richness of the findings'. Punch (2002) argues that researchers need to do this in a reflexive and sensitive way to ensure they do not patronise children and young people by underestimating their competence. Punch (2002, p.2) goes on to suggest that combining traditional 'adult' research methods, for example interviews (which demonstrates equal treatment), with more creative 'task-based methods' that may help children feel more comfortable with an adult researcher. This thesis aimed for this balance by adopting research methods intended to be fun and not patronising for young people, and instead recognises their competence. To facilitate this in the semi-structured interviews I drew on task-based research methods, included eco maps (Hartman 1978) and photo elicitation (Drew et al. 2010). Eco maps have been used in qualitative research settings with adults, for example Ray and Street (2005) and children, for example Hunt et al. (2008). Photography has

also been used with children, for example Rasmussen (2004) and adults, for example, Schwartz (1989). These methods could therefore be described as 'participant friendly' and as such they avoid the potentially demeaning term 'child friendly' (Punch 2002).

Visual research methods

Bryman (2008, p.424) argues that 'one of the most striking developments in qualitative research in recent years has been the growth of visual research methods'. However, the use of images is not a new phenomenon with the early social scientists, in particular anthropologists, using photographs to explore and explain cultural practices. For example, Bateson and Mead (1942) took over 2500 photographs in their visual ethnography of Balinese cultural life.

Becker (1974, p.89) describes how during the 1960's the use of visual methods declined, which he believes coincides with the rise of positivism. Becker argued that 'It is as though using photographs and films in a research report constituted pandering to the low tastes of the public or trying to persuade readers to accept shaky conclusions by using illegitimate, "rhetorical" means. In short, using visual materials seems "unscientific," probably because "science" in sociology came to be defined as being objective and neutral'. However, Becker (1974) goes on to highlight that with the subsequent emergence of post-modern thinking this shift from a quest for objectivity has seen a renewed interest in visual research methods.

Visual research methods are employed in this thesis as tools to assist with communication and organise data. However, if during an interview a participant became uninterested or reluctant to take photos or draw an eco-map they were put to one side. For example, Chrissie was one participant who engaged with the eco map exercise, but struggled to take photographs for the photo elicitation part of the study. In this instance the focus then became about developing a rapport and having a discussion using the semi-

structured schedule for guidance. Darbyshire et al. (2005) argue that using different qualitative methods leads to rich and detailed insights into children's experiences in the social world. They found that different methods did not just duplicate findings but instead offered a more holistic picture of the participant's perspectives.

In this study eco-maps were utilised to focus on social networks, the site of social capital as highlighted in the previous chapter, they also provide an opportunity to explore activities and places that were important to the young people. The use of photography was intended to build up a more holistic picture of their lived experience, specifically the activities that they are involved in and their relationship with places and spaces. The photography element was adopted in order to add to the research data and to glean another perspective of the ways that young people access social capital. This approach is also participatory and enabled the young people to become actively involved in the data collection. Hemming (2007, p.157) argues that adopting different qualitative methods adds value to a research project and that 'adding the extra perspective of participatory 'child centred' methods potentially brings more of children's own priorities and interpretations to the data'.

A critically reflexive approach has been adopted throughout the study and along with consideration of the appropriateness of applying the concept of social capital to this field of study, the strengths and limitations of applying task based visual methods will also form part of the field of inquiry and be considered in the concluding chapters of the thesis.

Eco-maps

Hartmann (1978) is credited as devising the first eco-map as a tool for assessing the family system. It remains a key assessment tool in social work, particularly in the field of family placement (Cournoyer 2010; Wilson et al. 2011). The eco-map allows practitioners to explore people's social networks and their relationships with their families, friends and communities (Coulshed & Orme 2006). This focus on social networks and people's interactions and participation in their environment has a natural synergy with the concept of social capital. The themes of social capital highlighted in chapter 2 have a clear fit with the 'person in their environment' (Kemp et al. 1997) approach, which is intrinsic to the form of eco-map being utilised in this study. Despite the initial intention of the eco-map to map family units, it still provides the opportunity for the young people in this study to include on the map, and discuss, family that they no longer live with, as well as the carers that they now live with and their interactions with their wider community. This is illustrated by Hartmann (1978) when she described the eco-map as follows:

'The eco-map is a simple paper-and-pencil simulation that has been developed as an assessment, planning, and interventive tool. It maps in a dynamic way the ecological system, the boundaries of which encompass the person or family in the life space. Included in the map are the major systems that are a part of the family's life and the nature of the family's relationship with the various systems. The eco-map portrays an overview of the family in their situation; it pictures the important nurturant or conflict-laden connections between the family and the world. It demonstrates the flow of resources, or the lacks and deprivations'. (Hartmann 1978, p.467)

Eco-maps are grounded in systems theory, which is a functionalist approach that attempts to explain how human behaviour exists within an interconnected system. Bertalanffy (1950) devised systems theory to explain

self-regulating systems in the field of biology; arguing that the natural world is an interconnected system that in his view changes through a systematic process of feedback. Bateson (1972) was influential in introducing the systems approach to the social sciences and this subsequently became central in the field of family therapy as it is noted as providing a useful theory base for therapeutic assessments and interventions with families (Dallos & Draper 2000). Burnham (1986, p.7) highlights how systems theory is also useful for social work interventions with families and described how adopting a systemic approach to social work practice means that:

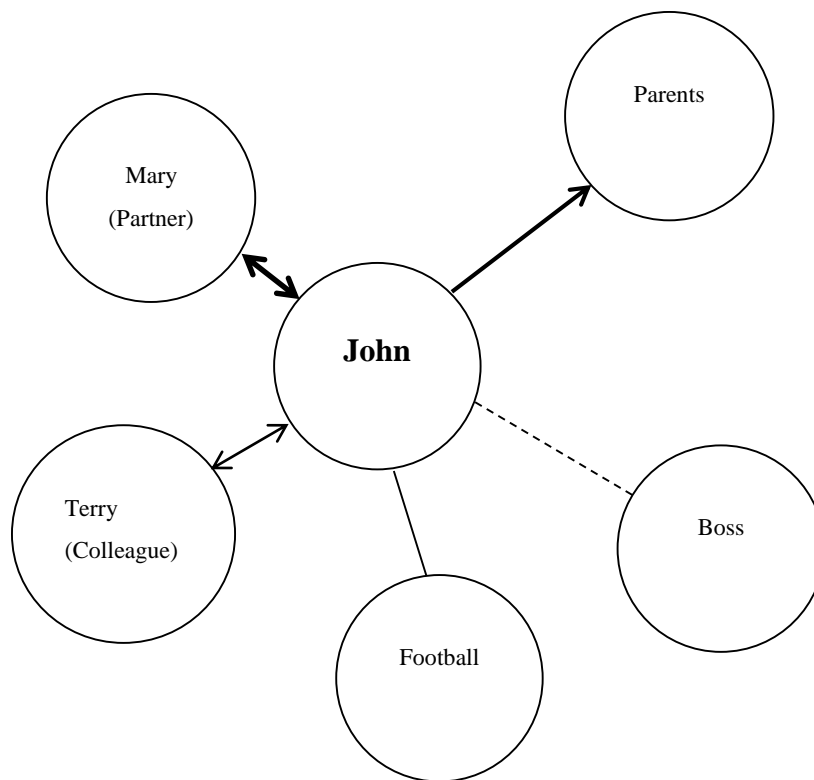
‘Problems are viewed as parts of repetitive sequences of interaction which maintain and are maintained by the problem. Such sequences may be observed in the present or identified as recurring themes throughout a family’s history. These repetitive behavioural patterns and enduring beliefs are interconnected into what might be called a family system. Practitioners using a systemic approach aim to identify the meaning and function of a presenting problem within the context of such a system.’

The development of systemic social work practice has also been influenced by the ecological perspective of Bronfenbrenner (1979), which has been described as a subset of systems theory (Dallos and Draper 2000). Bronfenbrenner (1979) devised a system of human development that consisted of 4 main systems; (1) the *micro system* which represents a family or a school or a neighbourhood; (2) the *meso system* which represents the relationships between the micro systems for example between the family home and the school; (3) the *exo system* that represents the influence of external factors such as the parent’s relationships with friends and colleagues; (4) and finally the *macro system* which represents society and is the sum of all the other systems. Bronfenbrenner used the image of ‘nested Russian dolls’ to explain how these various systems come together to form the overarching macro system of society. Wilson et al (2011, p.290) explain

that in the field of social work Bronfenbrenner's model 'has had an important influence in shifting thinking from narrow definitions of need and resources to ensure the wider social contexts of lives are considered as an integral aspect of the assessment process.' They go on to argue that the ecological model 'underpins' the framework for assessment which is widely used in social work practice with children in the UK.

What is more, there is a clear synergy between Bourdieu's concept of field and systems theory; in systems theory each social agent is linked within a system and they function to produce social action. For Bourdieu, each social agent is connected within fields that along with habitus and capital produce social action. However, Bourdieu (1992, p.103) explains the fundamental difference, 'as for systems theory, it is true that it has a number of surface similarities with field theory... but the differences between the two theories are nonetheless radical. For one thing, the notion of field excludes functionalism and organicism: the products of a given field may be systematic without being products of a system, especially a system characterised by common functions, internal cohesion and self-regulation.' As highlighted in the previous chapters Bourdieu's approach to social theory does not frame society as functioning systems but instead conceptualises the social as hierarchical with power and struggle over capital. Although Hartmann's (1978) eco-map is underpinned by systems theory it is also a practical assessment tool which involves the process of mapping the person in their environment. This allows an assessment of potential conflicts of power in their relationships as well as their interactions with their wider community. Hartmann's version of the eco-map consists of drawing interconnected circles to represent the person in their environment. This exercise starts by drawing a circle in the middle of the paper and writing the person's name inside of it. Circles are then drawn to represent people, places and services that are considered important to the person. Fig.1 is an example of a basic eco-map using Hartmann's method.

Figure 1. Eco-map example



The eco-map is intended to generate discussion about the strength of relationships and the importance of places and activities. This is then represented visually by lines that connect the circles. For example, in fig. 1 a strong dense line between circles represents strong relationships, so John has a strong relationship with his partner Mary, whereas a jagged faint line represents John's stressed or weak relationship with his boss. The arrowheads on the lines also indicate the flow of energy and support. Kemp et al (1997) describe how maps can highlight acts of reciprocity between a person and their network. This directly relates to Putnam's (2001) work on social capital where he argues that reciprocity is a key element of social capital (see chapter 2). For example, in figure 1, the arrows indicate that John has a relationship with his work colleague Terry that flows both ways with supportive acts of reciprocity. However, the map indicates the support that John provides to his parents at this stage in his life is one way. This also highlights a potential limitation with eco-maps that once the information is

drawn up it becomes static and represents a snapshot of that time. For example, John's parents may well have been very supportive towards him growing up but now that they are older they may require support themselves.

The lines and arrowheads were not utilised in this study, as I was keen for the young people to draw their own eco-maps in order to try and keep the activity participatory and importantly fun. I did initially try the arrows and lines in the pilot interviews; however, it seemed to add a level of unnecessary complexity for the young people to grasp. I therefore adopted a free form mapping approach asking the young people to use the stencils and coloured gel pens to draw the people important to them in circles on the large sheet of paper, with the instruction to put draw themselves in a circle in the middle then draw the people and places most important to them, closest to them on the map. The recorded conversations that took place about the people and places generated detailed data that was vital in capturing the context of the relationship being represented.

A potential limitation of using eco-maps in research is that it is a tool widely used in social work practice so young people may be aware of it and may have identified me as a social worker, which potentially could have impaired the young people's openness. However, the opposite may also have been true and the young people's previous experience of eco-maps may have been a potential strength, as the participants may have been more practised and adept at completing the map and thus provide lots of useful information. For example, they may have reflected on people and places that they left off last time they completed an eco-map, allowing them the opportunity to rectify omissions that they made in the past. By visiting the young people on two occasions I was able to minimise the young people potentially omitting important people from their eco-maps, as at the start of the second interview I was able to reintroduce the maps and review them with the young people. This was valuable as it allowed me to seek

clarification on information that was unclear in the first interview and it also allowed me to ask more probing questions on issues that I had reflected on and felt were pertinent and relevant for the study. For example, towards the end of the first interview with a young person called Nicola she spoke about her Mother being in prison and then quickly shifted the conversation to her friends at school. In the following interview I was able to review the eco-map with Nicola, which provided me with the opportunity to ask about her relationship with her Mother again in more detail.

In practice I was unsure how the participants were going to respond to the task based methods. I had an initial conversation to arrange an interview with a young person called Jack. After the call I was prepared to abandon the eco-map in favour of making attempts to building a rapport and developing a conversation, as Jack presented as being a streetwise young person and I was concerned that he may have found the idea of drawing a map with a researcher, patronising. How wrong was I? Jack was a keen artist, he was a huge fan of rap music and had a real love of street art. I sensed that seeing the large A2 artist sketch pad under my arm and the pens and stencils I was carrying (see photograph below) sparked an immediate interest from Jack. What I thought may have been seen as a potentially patronising barrier turned out to be a real bridge that quickly allowed me to build a rapport with Jack. Jack went on to produce a really creative and visually stunning eco-map that charted his social network and enabled him to talk in detail about the people and places that were important to him.



There are differing versions of eco maps and Hartmann (1979) explained the initial model was devised for practitioners to develop in order to fit within their own practice context. Whittaker and Tracy (1990) acknowledge the influence of Hartmann's model on their assessment tool the social network map. The social network map offers practitioners a guide to explore their client's relationships beyond their family and encompasses their wider environment. The map consists of a large circle divided in to seven domains that included areas such as school, family, friends, clubs and neighbours. The map is accompanied by a table used to calculate the numbers of people and amount of support a person has access to. The social network map was initially explored in this study to see if it could offer a way of examining social capital in the young people's lives. However, the quantitative focus on counting connections and measuring amounts of support was not appropriate for this study. The utility of adopting a social capital approach is that the resource within a network is not dependent on amount of relationships or the connections, social capital is a resource that can be drawn on from within the smallest of networks as it is much more about the quality of the relationships and the resources that they can offer. Narrowing the map to pre-determined domains, such as school, friends and

clubs and so on, also presented as being too prescriptive as it felt as though it could run the risk of forcing the data instead of following the young people's accounts. The study therefore utilised a more free form eco-map based on Hartmann's (1978) initial model that was more flexible. However, the eco-map was also guided by a semi-structured interview schedule (appendix 1), which is based on the themes of social capital set out in chapter 2.

The existing literature on eco-maps predominantly focuses on their use in direct social work practice; however, they have also been used in research and specifically with young people in public care. For example, Farmer and Moyers (2008) used the eco map to gather quantitative data about the social networks of young people in kinship foster care by recording numbers of people and frequencies of contact. Hunt et al. (2010) also used eco-maps with young people in kinship foster care using a model similar to Whittaker and Tracy (1990) based on concentric circles and predetermined domains.

In summary, the eco-map was used in this study to explore interactions within social networks, alongside a semi structured interview schedule and although the map is intended to organise the data, the conversations that took place whilst creating the map were viewed as being most important as they provided the context and the rich contextualised data in keeping with a qualitative study. Therefore, the maps themselves were not utilised as data to analyse but the transcribed discussion that took place whilst completing them was analysed. The maps are also not reproduced in the thesis in much detail for purposes of confidentiality, as they often recorded a wealth of identifying information.

Photo voice and photo elicitation

Drew et al (2010, p.1678) provides an example of the use of cameras in a research project when they explored young people's experiences of managing chronic health problems. They describe how they felt that using photographs in their research challenged potentially negative power relationships with young people and promoted active participation and in doing so it meant 'the adult researcher was able to develop rapport and build up a relationship of trust'. Butler and Williamson (1994) draw attention to the importance of developing a rapport and building trust when undertaking research with children and young people. Drew et al (2010, p.1681) also found that the use of cameras acted as an 'enticement in recruiting' with one participant reporting that the camera was 'better than a normal survey'. They found that the camera was a positive influence in the research process and particularly with girls as they felt it encouraged their active participation.

There is also a precedent for using visual methods in social capital research with young people. For example, Weller (2006) employed a range of qualitative methods that included diary writing, interviews/discussions and photography. Morrow (2001, p.257) also used a range of methods in a social capital study that explored 'young people's perspectives on their social context and environments'. These methods included young people drawing maps of their local community and taking photos of places important to them. Morrow (2001, p.257) argued that 'using photography is one way of eliciting views, it is cheap, easy to do, fun and it generates visual data that can used to stimulate further data and debate about neighbourhood environments.' However, the following quotation from Punch (2002) highlights that there are potential limitations in using photography in research which centre on how representative the images are of the participants day to day experiences:

‘A disadvantage of using such a visual technique is that the chosen image is influenced by the season when the photograph is taken. For example, several children took pictures of potato fields since it happened to be the time of year when the crop was in flower and looked its prettiest. Spontaneous images of an event occurring at that moment were more likely to be captured than depicted in a drawing. This may have led to an over-emphasis of importance for that event. For example, a photograph taken of boys fighting in the village square shows a particular moment in time, but does not necessarily mean that fighting is a very important aspect of their lives. Also, the children might have been more tempted to take pictures of what they wanted to keep as a photograph afterwards. Alternatively they may have taken pictures of what they considered makes a 'good' photograph.’ (Punch 2002, p.322)

Punch (2002) described that in order to negate these limitations it is important to listen to children describing their reasons for taking the photographs. They also reinforce the need to adopt a reflexive approach during data analysis and by making any limitations in the data explicit. Becker (1986) describes how the camera can be used to distort the truth with both researchers and participants’ selecting what is photographed and what is not photographed and what is included in the research and what is not included. For example, the young people in this study may have been reluctant to take photographs of personal or intimate spaces such as their bedrooms. However, it could also be argued that other research approaches face this problem with the research participant holding the power to disclose or not to disclose the personal and intimate.

Despite these apparent limitations, Hemming (2008) argues that the use of photos can provide the opportunity for adult researchers to be taken into unknown environments. Rasmussen (2004) highlights the potential of

photos to uncover 'children's places' spaces and activities often hidden to adults. Rasmussen's research includes photos of a camp built in the woods that the children described in detail as cities that they had created. The research provided insights that followed the children's experiences and went beyond describing 'places for children' such as the school and the playground to revealing 'children's places' where experiences and interactions may often be obscured from the adult world (Rasmussen 2004). Becker (1998) also reinforces the potential benefit of using photographs as it 'provides material for the continuing examination of ways of telling about society, whether through words, numbers, or pictures'.

Morrow (2001) utilised an approach to photography in her social capital research with young people that frames the photos as being both visual data to analyse and for use as a tool to elicit discussion and detailed information. This is in keeping with an approach to photography described by Drew et al. (2011) as visual storytelling. Drew et al. (2011,) argue that visual storytelling draws on the established methods of both photo voice and photo elicitation. Photo voice is a community group based participatory approach where images are seen as a powerful medium for communicating issues (Wilson et al. 2007). The emphasis is more on the images themselves as research data rather than what the participants say about the images (Drew et al. 2011). Wang and Burris (1997) developed the method photo voice as a research approach to enable participants to visually portray experiences in order to share their knowledge. Nykiforuk et al. (2011) argue that photo voice is empowering as it is participatory and places interviewees as active members of the research team. Nykiforuk et al. (2011) adopted an empowering methodology by combining photo voice with a community group based participatory action research approach. The images taken by the participants were displayed at a community event and this was seen as a powerful way to highlight local themes and issues in order to instigate change. In the photo voice approach the emphasis is more on the images

themselves as research data rather than what the participants say about the images (Wang & Burris 1997).

The photo elicitation approach that is adopted in this study differs to photo voice as it emphasises descriptions of the photograph and the meanings participants attach to them (Collier 1957). Becker (1974, p.5) is noted as a key theorist in visual sociology and he draws attention to the importance of recognising how meaning is attached to images, he states; 'just as paintings get their meaning in a world of painters, collectors, critics, and curators, so photographs get their meaning from the way the people involved with them understand them, use them, and thereby attribute meaning to them.' Harper (2002) describes how photo elicitation approaches are undertaken in two differing ways. First, a researcher can bring along photographs that they have taken to show in an interview in order to elicit responses from participants. Second, participants can be given photography equipment and encouraged to take the photos that are then discussed during an interview at a later stage. This approach has been adopted in previous social capital research with young people (Morrow 2001; Weller 2006). Harper (1988) highlights the strength of this participatory approach and asserts that photographs can be useful as they are a presentation of emotion; as well as being a useful tool to elicit information in interviews. This study also adopts this participatory approach, whereby getting the young people to take the photos aims to involve them in the process of data collection. Although the photographic images are used in the thesis and the visual content is to some extent analysed and discussed, the predominant analysis is of the interview transcript, where the young people explain the meaning behind the photographs that they chose to take. Therefore, photography is utilised as a task based method to elicit conversations, and it is the transcriptions of these conversations that form the qualitative data that was analysed.

Towards the end of the first interview the photo project was fully explained to the young people and they were asked if they wished to take

part, which every participant chose to do. They were then given an instruction sheet about how to use the camera and the following information sheet with some advice on the kinds of things to take photos of.

The photo project

The aim of the photo project is to find out about the places and activities that are important to you.

Try not to take photos of people, because they might not want to be involved in the project and I would not have their permission to take part.

The idea is the camera is left with you for the next two weeks to take photos that represent the places and activities that are important to you. If over the next two weeks you are not visiting the place or doing the activity take a photo of something that reminds you of it and then you can tell me all about it. The next time I come out we can look at the photos together and you can explain them to me.

We will not have time to talk about lots of photos so before I arrive make a note of the 10 photographs that you would most like to discuss and to be included in the research. Instead of us talking a little bit about lots of photos I hope we can talk a lot about just a few!

So go ahead and take 10 photos that represent the places and activities most important to you! Any problems give me a call or send me a text or an email

The use of cameras seemed to be of real interest to the young people, with positive comments from them about the activity. Most of the participants took ten photographs, which they were asked to do, however one young person lost the battery charger to the digital camera and only took three photographs, this resulted in a hypothetical photo elicitation approach with us talking through what he would have photographed if he had a working camera! In total some eighty photographs were taken from the ten young people who participated in the study.

In summary, qualitative task based methods were employed in this study in order to explore the overall research question:-

Do young people in foster care engage in practices within their social networks that enable them to maintain and build their access to social capital, and if so how?

The eco map and the photo elicitation methods were utilised as creative tools to explore the ways that young people are managing their relationships in their social networks. The data that these methods generated, wherever possible, came primarily from the discussions with the young people as this enabled them to communicate the meaning of the images. However, a number of the photographs are included and analysed, as at times they do communicate important aspects of the young people's experiences, and have relevance for the study.

Chapter 4 Research processes

This chapter presents the research design in more detail, with a critically reflexive account of the research processes that were followed during the study. In order to achieve this, the chapter includes sections on reflexivity, sampling, ethical considerations, and thematic analysis.

Reflexivity

A researcher's background can affect the choices that they make during the process of research. Malterud (2001, p. 483) argues that a researchers background will influence what they 'choose to investigate, the angle of their investigation, the methods judged most adequate for this purpose, the findings considered most appropriate, and the framing and communication of conclusions'. It is common in the social sciences, particularly in qualitative research, to commit to a process of reflexivity, as a way to systematically attend to how knowledge is constructed in the process of empirical research. For example, Bourdieu (1992) argues that reflexivity is a necessary component of social research as it is an essential process to account for the effect a researcher may have on the study and the findings it produces. Although this small section is the only part of the thesis that falls under a heading with the word reflexivity within it, it is hoped that it sets the scene and that whilst reading the finished document as a whole, a critically reflexive approach is evident throughout.

I adopted a reflexive approach to this research in order to minimise the potential impact that my previous experiences had on the study. To achieve this I have aimed to make the decisions made during the research explicit and transparent, for the reader to judge their appropriateness. For example, it is hoped the decisions made so far in the first part of the thesis in relation to the chosen conceptual framework have been justified and underpinned by existing theory. The findings and conclusions that follow,

also aim for this level of transparency and it is hoped they represent a justified analysis that is grounded in the data, and evidenced specifically from the accounts of the young people. These accounts are mainly presented in the form of direct and often extended excerpts from the transcripts, which again enable the reader to gain a sense of the context so that they are able to judge the appropriateness of the analysis.

From practitioner to researcher

Prior to qualifying as a social worker, I had gained experienced in different social care organisations across the public, voluntary and independent sectors, ranging from youth clubs, to residential units, to secure accommodation. These experiences provided the motivation for me to undertake research with young people and my recent work, as a family placement social worker, drove my interest to research young people's experiences of foster care. Although this was valuable and relevant experience that provided me with a working knowledge of foster care, which had benefits for the research, it also brought with it a degree of complexity that required the very real shift from practitioner to researcher, to be considered.

As a previous social work practitioner and indeed as someone who is still registered as a social worker I have a form of insider status (Labaree 2002). An insider status undoubtedly brings with it positives; I had a working understanding of the processes of the public care system, I understood terminology; and felt I had an empathic grasp of some of the challenges children and young people face and overcome on a daily basis whilst growing up in care, for example, multiple placement moves and the emotional impact of separation from their family. However, insider status also serves to be a source of potential bias and challenges the notion of scholarly detachment. Woodthorpe (2011, p.99) describes that 'a long-standing and ongoing debate in social research, the concept and management of scholarly detachment – particularly in qualitative research –

is closely entwined with discussions about neutrality and whether a researcher and what they produce can be unbiased.'

Instead of 'doing reflexivity' in a kind of procedural tick box way, I have attempted to challenge assumptions and preconceptions throughout the study as a way of attempting to achieve a degree of scholarly detachment. Woodthorpe concludes that aiming for complete detachment in social research settings is an unrealistic as researchers are social agents too. Therefore, to achieve complete scholarly detachment was not the goal of this research, but it was a goal to make potential sources of bias explicit, and to do this it was important to highlight how my background as a practitioner may have influenced the analytical interpretation of the data that follows.

The challenge for me in this doctoral study was to consider the impact that my past practice experiences and also my growing knowledge of the foster care literature had on the thesis. I came to this study with assumptions and preconceived ideas about foster care and although preconceptions bring with them potential for bias, Malterud (2001, p.484) writes: "Preconceptions are not the same as bias, unless the researcher fails to mention them". It has been important to acknowledge that the site of the research is a familiar one, for ten years I have visited foster placements and this has given me a complex understanding and a multitude of preconceptions about foster care that are too numerous to list here.

In summary, the interpretation of the findings and the conclusions that are made aim to be grounded in the data, the potential influence of my previous experiences have been disclosed in the thesis and reflected on throughout the process, so that they do not unduly bias the analysis. I have attempted to present a trustworthy account and I have aimed to make the reasoning behind methodological and analytical choices explicit throughout the thesis. It is important to acknowledge that there are different ways of knowing and understanding the experience of foster care, my experiences have influenced this thesis I have an awareness of practice tensions and

debates and my focus on the young people's social capital may not have been considered to be as worthy of discussion by a researcher without experience of foster care. Whilst these different ways of designing research and interpreting data the process could be seen as problematic and the research may seem less reliable. However, the possibility of different understandings actually provide rich varied accounts and reflect what are in fact complex and nuanced social practices, which are open to differing interpretation.

Sampling

In order to gather the most relevant data to explore the research question a purposive sampling strategy was employed. This, Denscombe (2007, p.77) explains produces a sample that is 'hand-picked' based on characteristics determined by the researcher. For this study, adopting this approach allowed overt decisions to be made about the characteristics of a sample. The sample was purposively chosen for the following reasons.

The first determinant for the sample was that participants needed to be young people living in foster care. The young people who were recruited were currently in placement, in order to capture the contemporary experience of foster care, so the research represents what the experience is like at this time. It is important to acknowledge that there is no triangulation within the study. There are potentially other viewpoints that might differ from those of the young people interviewed for this study, for example, foster carers, and social workers. However, the choice was made to focus on gathering accounts directly from young people in foster care and this is important as they are at the centre of the experience.

The next key sampling decision to be made was what the age range of the participants should be. This was done by considering age groups of children and young people and reflecting on the strengths and limitations of a potential sample of participants from a wide age range from 0-18 years. An

age range of young people between the ages of 12-14 was decided upon as I felt this was a grouping with sufficient homogeneity of experience. It was also thought that widening the age range further to say 12 year old to 16 year old may be problematic as the experiences of a 12 year old compared to a 16 year old may be very different. The age range between 12-14 is also important as it includes young people that have transitioned from primary school to secondary to school, which is critical for this study as it means the sample includes young people that have transferred to a whole new range of social relationships. A two year age range also proved to be wide enough to provide a sufficient number of potential participants for the study. Making these purposive decisions in an overt way has resulted in accessing a sample of participants that were all able to offer rich insights into the experience of foster care and the practices they participate in within their social networks that enable them to access social capital.

Initially it was hoped that I would have been able to interview young people across two different local authorities. However, this proved problematic and ultimately I was unable to negotiate access within local authorities where I had no pre-existing connections. Negotiating access in social research in general is documented as being problematic (Bryman 2008), furthermore, accessing young people in the care of the local authority for research purposes has been documented as being a doubly challenging process (Heptinstall 2000; Ward et al. 2005) due to the number of potential gatekeepers. I can certainly attest to it being a challenging process, I wrote countless emails and made phone calls to managers of fostering and family placement teams across the south west region of England and received the minimal of responses. The closest I did get to a response was a two line email from a team manager stating that they would give the project consideration and get back to me. What followed was a period where they never responded to any of my follow up emails or accepted any of my phone calls. In the end identifying young people and negotiating access to the sample was undertaken using the benefits of my existing contacts in the field of

family placement, utilising my own social networks. Therefore, the young people were all placed within a local authority where I once worked as a social worker. This form of sampling is often referred to as 'convenience' sampling (Merriam 2014). However, in this study with the complexities of negotiating access in order to reach looked after children it was more like a 'vital' approach to sampling than 'convenience'. My familiarity with the team managers and my insider status within the local authority did bring with it benefits and I was helped by friendly colleagues who were supportive of the research. The local authority is a forty minute drive to the centre of London and is popular with commuters that work in the city. The authority is a mix of rural and urban, with countryside and villages surrounding a large town that has a vibrant and diverse demographic.

With insider status there was potential for bias to exist as I had a pre-existing relationship with the local authority and the people who worked within it. This bias could have become apparent in the analysis, I could have over identified with the social workers and the carers in the teams, some of whom I knew, and this could have led me to an uncritical analysis of the young people's experiences. However, by being open and highlighting this source of potential bias adds rigour to the analysis. I might add that, as a registered social worker, the possibility of this kind of bias could have occurred in any local authority in which I undertook the research, as I still could have over identified with my fellow practitioners. In an attempt to negate bias I adopted a critically reflexive approach in order to aim to present a trustworthy analysis of the experiences of the young people in foster care, both the positives and the negatives.

Despite having the insider status that initially got my foot in the door at the local authority I was, quite rightly, still required to go through the local authority's policies and procedures to ensure ethical research practice. This involved gaining an up to date criminal records bureau check and also applying for permission to undertake the research through the local

authority's research governance panel. Once I passed the local authority research governance procedure I met with a manager in the family placement team and we went through the list of children and young people currently placed with the foster carers in that area. Of the eighty six children and young people placed at the time, fourteen were between the ages of twelve and fourteen and therefore fitted within my sampling frame. At this point I attended a team meeting with the social workers in the Looked After Children team, where I explained the research and passed on information sheets for the social workers (Appendix 3) detailing the project. I then contacted the social workers of the fourteen eligible young people via email to begin the process of negotiating access.

Of these fourteen young people there were two who were deemed by their social workers to be in too vulnerable a state to engage in research at this time. For example, one young person had been experiencing mental health difficulties, they had been excluded from school and they were living in a fragile placement that was on the verge of breakdown. The social worker's judgement was that the timing of the study was not appropriate for this young person, which of course was a judgement I respected. The scenario was very similar for the other eligible young person whose social worker felt their involvement in the study at this time was not appropriate. From the remaining twelve young people their social workers were happy for me to make contact with the carers to explain the research and to speak with the young people to see if they wanted to participate. At the end of this process I had ten young people that wanted to take part in the study.

During this process of negotiating access I also attended a session of the Looked After Children Group that was facilitated by a youth worker in the local authority. The main purpose of the group is to enable the local authority to consult and gather the views of the young people placed in care. The group also provides a forum for young people in care to meet with others who share their experience. The six young people in this group

proved to be an invaluable resource and they acted as an important consultation group for the study, which is in keeping with the partnership values of social work and an anti-oppressive way of conducting research with young people (Rogers 2012). I shared with the group the methods I intended to use in order to research their experience of foster care and I also shared the documents such as the information sheets for young people (Appendix 3) and the consent forms (Appendix 4) to ensure they were written in a clear way that was not patronising yet understandable for a young person aged between twelve and fourteen years old. This process brought about significant changes to the information sheets, for example, it is not until you hear a twelve year old struggle to read the word participate that you realise the words 'join in' are just much more straightforward.

Sample size

At the start of the study I had set the goal of interviewing twenty young people on two occasions a total of forty interviews. After the interviews with the ten young people within the area I used to work, I was planning to persevere with my attempts to negotiate access with other local authorities to reach this target of twenty young people. In hindsight this target of forty interviews was both optimistic and also for the purpose of gathering rich and detailed data it proved to be unnecessary. I began the process of thematic data analysis (discussed in a following section) after the first interview, transcribing and coding the transcripts was an ongoing process alongside the data collection. After completing twenty interviews there was an increasing recurrence of emerging themes from the data and it became apparent that a level of thematic saturation was achieved. At this point I was confident that I had enough data to proceed with the analysis. In fact on reflection after just two interviews I felt I could have written thousands of words based on the rich contextualised data I was obtaining from the young people. The sample size of ten young people proved to be more than adequate as on completion of the twenty interviews I had

generated over twenty three hours of recorded conversations and over four hundred pages of transcription. The task based visual methods I employed also produced a wealth of data with ten eco-maps and over eighty photographs. The findings include the experiences of all ten young people that were interviewed; some young people's accounts are more prevalent in the findings section than others. This has occurred for two key reasons, firstly by returning to the accounts of key participants such as Nicola and Jade this has built a coherent narrative and also provided detailed context to what is meant to be a rich qualitative analysis. Furthermore, the accounts of the young people that were selected and presented in the findings section were primarily chosen as they were able to encapsulate and best illustrate themes that emerged across the data.

Reaching the hard to reach

Heptinstall et al. (2001) suggest that those young people with positive experiences of foster care may be more inclined than others to take part in research. The following quotation from Ward et al. (2005, p.11) reinforces this point when they describe the limitations within their sample:

“Young people who are both accessible and willing to take part in a study such as this are likely to be those with better outcomes. Young people who are contending with major difficulties such as criminality, prostitution and/or addiction will be harder to trace, less well organised and therefore less likely to keep interview appointments.”
(Ward et al. 2005, p.11)

With the documented challenges of accessing young people in foster care and this potential for samples to be positively slanted, I was keen to interview those young people that other studies had found it hard to reach. My insider status at the local authority helped with this as I was able to explain to managers and practitioners the importance of reaching a sample

of young people with a range of foster care experience both good and bad. As I previously discussed, there were two young people whose social workers deemed them as being too vulnerable to participate at the time. Despite this I still feel I was able to reach some young people whose experiences and voices could have easily been lost. For example, Jack was a young person who participated in this study who was not having the easiest of times in his placement and reaching him proved to be important for really capturing an often unheard experience of foster care.

Jack had been in care since he was an infant with a total of eight family placements before he was placed for adoption at the age of seven with his younger brother. This adoptive placement subsequently broke down and with his brother remaining with his adoptive parents Jack was returned to foster care, where he is now living, at the age of fourteen, in his eleventh placement. He had experienced an exclusion from school after a breaking a fellow pupils collarbone during a fight and he had also been arrested after breaking in to a house. On my first scheduled visit to Jack I arrived at his foster carers flat at the agreed time after school at 4pm, unfortunately Jack had already gone out to see his friends. I tried texting him and letting him know I was able to wait for him but after an hour he did not respond to my texts or return home. I left him a note reassuring him that missing an appointment was not a problem and that I still really wanted to meet him. I then rescheduled an appointment with him via text for the following week, this time I arrived early and greeted him as he stepped out of his foster carer's car on return from school.

Despite the challenges in getting to Jack, in the end the rescheduling of appointments was worthwhile as he turned out to be a key participant able to articulate his often challenging experience of foster care in a powerful way. I could have excluded Jack from the study after he missed the first appointment and chose not to go back up the motorway again to avoid the risk of another missed appointment. However, without Jack's input and his

participation in the research this thesis could have been a very different story and would have missed an important part of the foster care picture.

Ethical consideration

The University of Bath's ethical procedures were followed and an ethics form (Appendix 5) was completed and submitted to the head of department. As previously mentioned the study also complied with the ethical policies and procedure of the local authority where the study took place. This involved making an application to the authority's research governance pane, which was completed and full permission to proceed was granted. These ethical procedures were beneficial and ensured that an ethical approach was built in to the research design. However, this study viewed ethics as more of an ongoing process (Butler 2002) and an approach to conducting research that was trustworthy and minimised potential harm to the participants. As Morrow & Richard (1996, p.94) reinforces the view that ethics is a process and argues that research with children and young people should be 'situational and responsive'.

Informed consent

A key ethical aspect to this research was ensuring that the participants were fully informed of the nature of the study, so they could decide whether or not they wanted to take part. The Social Research Association (2003, p.28) describe informed consent as 'a procedure for ensuring that research participants understand what is being done to them, the limits to their participation and awareness of any potential risks they incur'.

There is a growing literature on child rights that espouses participation and a contemporary literature on childhood that promotes children as competent social agents who should be involved in research (Williams & Rogers 2014). However, Coyne (2010) argues that this

recognition of children's rights and competence is not always evident in research processes to gain informed consent. They describe how it is common practice to be overly protective and gain proxy consent from an adult who holds parental responsibility (PR), which is problematic as it could result in children who wanted to take part in research being stopped from doing so because of the power of their parents' wishes (Goodenough et al. 2003). It is important to acknowledge that adult decisions to stop children and young people participating in research may well be made in the best interests of the children. For example, as previously mentioned in this research, two young people who potentially could have participated in the study were restricted from doing so because their social workers felt it was not right for them to do so at that time. The social workers explained the context and the reasoning behind their decisions, which seemed appropriate decisions given the unsettled and vulnerable state the young people were in at the time.

Coyne (2010) describes how in the UK the legalities of gaining consent for children and young people to participate in research are not clear cut. Researchers are often guided by case law and the guidance provided by Lord Fraser to determine if a child shows sufficient understanding and is 'Gillick competent' (Anon 1985). However, this case law refers to a young person consenting for medical treatment and as such its applicability in relation to gaining consent to participate in research is not straightforward and leaves some ambiguity in the legality of children and young people offering their own consent to participate (Coyne 2010).

There is an added dimension of complexity when attempting to gain consent from parents when undertaking research with young people in public care. This is because the young people are often on care orders, under S31 of The Children Act (1989), which means that the local authority share PR with the parents. In practice this means that gaining consent can be difficult as parents may be in conflict with the local authority over decisions that lead

their child's placement in care, or the parent may no longer be involved in their child's care. Most of the children's social workers were able to contact the parents so that they could consent to their child taking part in the research. However, there were two cases where the parents did not respond to the social worker's requests for permission. In these two instances an information sheet was sent to the parent (Appendix 6) informing them that their child wanted to participate and that unless they withdrew their consent within two weeks, then if the young person wanted to and the social worker agreed, they would be taking part. These arrangements for gaining consent were considered in advance and they were deemed appropriate and approved by the research governance panel of the local authority. Although these complex scenarios could have made gaining the appropriate informed consents a challenge, in this study it was actually a straightforward process. However, if challenges had arisen they would have been considered and where necessary specific advice, for example legal advice, would have been sought. This highlights the point that ethics is not solely about preparing for every ethical dilemma that may arise in the course of a study through the process of completing an ethics form, but an approach to research that continually reflects upon and addresses ethical issues as they arise. As Alderson and Morrow (2004, p.99) explain ethics procedures 'are about helping researchers to be more aware of the hidden problems and questions in research, and ways of dealing with these, though they do not provide simple answers'.

In order to ensure the young people were giving informed consent to participate, it was important to ensure that they were informed about the detail of the study so that understood what they were consenting to take part in. To ensure this, an information sheet (Appendix 3) was produced, in conjunction with a group of young people in foster care, detailing the project and this was sent to them prior to the interviews. This information sheet and the consent form were discussed at the beginning of interview in detail to attempt to ensure they fully understood the nature and purpose of the study,

at this point they were then asked to sign the consent form (Appendix 4). At the end of the last interview the young people were asked again if they still wanted to participate and were happy for me to share their anonymised experiences, and whether there were any of the photographs they had taken they did not want to be used in the study. Participants were also given the opportunity to withdraw their consent to participate up until February 2014 at which point the writing up process of the thesis would have commenced.

Avoidance of distress

A fundamental aspect of ethical social research is the importance of causing no harm to participants. It is a principle that is evident in numerous institutional ethical guidelines and policy documents (ESRC 2010; SRA 2003) Young people are placed in foster care due to a wide range of complex situations, often after experiencing abuse and/or neglect. This meant that the research was taking place in what was potentially a very emotive field and there was the potential for participants to experience considerable upset when discussing their life experiences and their foster care placements.

Prior to the interviews it was important to consider possible responses if a young person were to become upset and these were documented in the ethics form (appendix 5). These planned responses centred on two things, firstly, by utilising my skills and experiences as a social worker I would be able to offer direct emotional support where necessary and then identify appropriate avenues of support if required. The second response that was planned was that if a young person became unduly upset the young person would be given the opportunity to end the interview. These responses were intended to ensure the research would adhere to the central tenet of ethical research, do no harm.

These responses served as a good starting point; however, in practice judgements around the concept of harm can be problematic. For example, Haggerty critiques notions of differing levels of harm explaining that (2004, p.400) 'questions persist about where the line separating minimal from

greater than minimal harm will be drawn in practice'. Robson (2001, p. 140) argues that assessments of harm are further complicated if you acknowledge that in some circumstances 'collective needs [of a particular group] justify costs to individual members in efforts to raise awareness of those needs'.

The Ethical Research Involving Children (ERIC 2013) project also acknowledges the complexity of balancing the risks of harm with the potential benefits of a participating in research. They state: 'there are clearly divergent opinions about what constitutes harm and benefit and related issues such as acceptable levels of risk'. They argue that the way forward is for researchers to reflect on these issues and for ethical researchers to aim to minimise risks and maximise benefits. Robson (2001, p. 140) reinforces this point when she highlights that some element of risk is acceptable as potentially the 'collective needs [of a particular group] justify costs to individual members in efforts to raise awareness of those needs'. The justification for this thesis, and its direct interactions with young people, is that it aimed to learn from their experiences in order to provide important messages for social work policy and practice, which could potentially result in improvements in practice.

During the research the young people presented as confident and resilient and they were able and keen to discuss intimate and emotional aspects of their experiences in foster care. On one occasion a young person did become upset and tearful. At the beginning of Jade's second interview she quickly revealed to me that she was 'fed up', on asking her why, she became tearful. Jade explained that she found out that day she was going to be moving placement. I gave Jade time to compose herself when we talked the situation through and I gave her the option to stop the interview all together, or to return another time. Jade was keen to progress and with a little time she went on to speak with me for an hour and half. The experience led me to reflect on the issue of harm and determining what is an acceptable level of upset for the potential benefits that this research presents. This

specific issue of children and young people crying during interviews has been written about. For example Robson (2001, p.141), argues that sensitive research with children can be 'worth the tears' if the benefits of the research are justified, which was apparent in her study that highlighted the significant and invisible needs of children and young people who were caring for terminally ill parents in Zimbabwe. Robson (2001) also explains that tears can be a form of communication, a voice that needs to be listened to.

On reflection this research viewed ethics as an ongoing process and attempts were made throughout to minimise harm and upset, although Jade did become tearful, in the context of her experiences that day this seemed wholly appropriate. Jade's upset quickly lessened as the interview progressed and at the end of the interview she presented as calm and happy. In this instance it seemed acceptable that Jade was tearful for a short time and her continued involvement in the interviews was justified on two fronts; firstly she chose to continue with the interview exercising her agency; secondly, her tears communicated a powerful message about the emotional impact of placement moves for young people in foster care.

Confidentiality, anonymity and limitations

The participants were assured that at the point of transcription that their names would be changed and pseudonyms would be used to ensure anonymity. All of the audio recordings were also deleted once they had been transcribed. It was also made clear to the young people that privacy and confidentiality would be maintained unless a potential safeguarding issue was disclosed. This limited confidentiality is not uncommon in social work and it is often made explicit in practice with clients and when discussing cases at training. Hugman & Smith (1995) describe this as 'confidentiality with contextual limits'. I also included details of this on the consent form (Appendix 4) that I gave to the young people about the project, where I stated ' I will not tell anyone what you have told me, unless you tell me

something that makes me really worried about your safety. This consent form, and this specific issue, was discussed at the start of the first interview.

Incentives

There is a lack of consensus in the literature on whether young people should be offered an incentive for taking part in research (Kellett & Ding, 2004). There is also a lack of clarity about what kinds of incentives are appropriate, be it a direct cash payment or some form of gift (Gallagher, 2009). Hill (2005) describes how some researchers view the practice negatively as a form of bribery or inducement, whilst others see it as a fair way to compensate someone for their time.

I met with each young person on two occasions. The interviews ranged from one to two hours in duration. I was also asking the young people to act as photo researchers between the interviews, which was another demand on their time. Therefore, given this time commitment I felt it was appropriate to offer them a voucher for thirty pounds. I considered whether offering incentives could potentially affect the data, as Fargas Malet et al (2010) argue it may place pressure on participants to take part and make them eager to please, which might result in them trying to present an account of their experience that they feel the researcher wants to hear.

There is also an argument that the incentive should not be discussed with participants prior to the interview and given to them at the end as a surprise reward (Emanuel et al. 2011, p.386). However, I aimed for more of a transparent approach and told the young people whilst arranging the first interview that they would be given a voucher as a thank you for taking part. This benefitted the recruitment of participants who I found were certainly keen to take part. In order for this to not become too instrumental or coercive I did inform the young people at the start of the second interview that their incentive reward was not entirely dependent on their participation and if they wanted to withdraw their informed consent they could still have the

gift voucher. Overall, I would argue that the use of vouchers was reasonable and appropriate as it valued the young people's voluntary participation in the research. All of the young people provided what seemed detailed, open and honest accounts of their experiences in foster care; therefore, there was no evidence to suggest that offering an incentive unduly compromised the findings.

Trustworthiness

Reliability and validity are common concepts of quality assurance that are associated with quantitative research (Bryman 2008). These concepts are concerned with ensuring scientific rigour in research findings, as producing reliable and valid findings allows for transferability and generalisations to be made. A generalisable truth was not the aim for this qualitative study with a small sample, so the quality assurance concepts of reliability and validity were not appropriate in this instance.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) provide a concept for ensuring quality and rigour in qualitative research that they refer to as '*trustworthiness*'. Lincoln and Guba (1985) state trustworthy research needs to be credible and to achieve this it needs to be in depth and the methodology needs to be transparent. In particular they call for the methods of data analysis to be described in detail. Kamberelis and Dimitriadis (2005, p.905) describe how there is no such thing as 'neutral qualitative inquiry'. This view fits with the social constructivist underpinning of this study which supports the need to adopt a reflexive approach that aims to make potential sources of bias explicit. This transparent reflexive approach aims to enhance the study's trustworthiness in order to allow readers to determine the transferability of the findings to their own context. This study aims for trustworthiness by fully describing the context and explaining the process of data analysis in detail.

Thematic analysis and Nvivo 10

The audio recordings of the interviews were transcribed in full and a framework of *thematic analysis* was used to identify the emerging concepts. Thematic analysis has been described as an accessible and flexible approach to qualitative data analysis (Braun and Clarke 2006). It has been criticised for not having a distinctive set of techniques to follow as with other methods of analysis such as grounded theory (Bryman 2008). However, the flexible nature of the approach became one of the strengths for this project as it enabled the findings to be viewed through the analytical frame of social capital, yet allowed the identification of themes that required further theoretical consideration and analytical frame to be developed further. For example, the importance of the concept of stigma became apparent during the analysis and prompted a return to the theory to ensure young people's experiences could be understood through the use of appropriate theory.

Braun and Clarke (2006, p.81) describe how a number of qualitative researchers attempt to use grounded theory to analyse their data and end up producing a form of analysis that they refer to as a 'grounded theory lite'. Grounded theory is meant as a rigorous analytical technique, which provides a set framework and method for coding data. However, a grounded theory approach ultimately relies on a continuous return to the field to gather more data until theoretical saturation (Glaser and Strauss 1967) is reached, which is problematic within the confines of a doctoral study's timescales. To avoid producing a weak grounded theory, this study utilised Braun and Clarke's (2006, p.77) six stage framework, which enables a 'deliberate and rigorous' thematic analysis. The six stages begin with the researcher familiarising themselves with the data, in this study this process occurred during the transcription of the twenty interviews. The recorded interviews were listened to and transcribed and the completed transcripts were read over and over again.

During the second stage of the process initial codes were generated, this involves thinking about the data in small pieces almost decontextualizing it. To achieve this, the transcripts were imported and stored in the qualitative data analysis software Nvivo 10. The use of data analysis software has its critics (Hesse-Biber 1995), as there can be a tendency to code and quantify data too easily without rigorous analysis. Whilst using NVivo it is tempting to look at the amount of nodes being generated and the number of times they were referred to across the different interviews. However, I heeded the advice of Braun and Clarke (2006, p.82) whilst analysing the codes, as they observed the following about the 'prevalence' of codes in qualitative research: "keyness of a theme is not necessarily dependent on quantifiable measures – but rather on whether it captures something important in relation to the overall research question". The third stage of a thematic analysis is to begin to develop overarching themes where the codes seem to fit. In this instance I did this with the use with of NVivo, whereby I created key parent nodes, which enabled me to begin the process of thinking about the coded data thematically.

Stage four of a thematic analysis involves thinking about the themes in relation to the analytical framework. It was at this point where it became apparent that the analysis needed to draw in the theory of stigma to develop understandings of the phenomena being observed in the data. During stage five of the thematic analysis the themes are defined and they begin to really contribute a way of understanding the data by highlighting the meaning in the data beyond surface explanations. In short, this stage of the analysis begins the rich, deep analysis of the phenomena.

Stage six is the final stage of a thematic analysis. It is the writing up of the report, or in this instance the thesis. The framework of thematic analysis recognises that writing up research findings is an iterative process, which fits with doctoral studies that involve an ongoing and evolving analysis of data until the point of submission. The act of drafting findings chapters, editing

theory chapters to ensure a coherent narrative, leads to a continuous analysis, which is unceasing until the moment the thesis is bound between two hard covers.

Presentation of the findings: considerations on the use of quotations

The ways to present qualitative findings and the use of verbatim quotations have been discussed in the research methods literature across a range of disciplines (Schwandt et al. 2007; Beck 1993; Holloway 2009). These discussions often centre on the quality or credibility of qualitative research evidence. For example, Emden & Sandelowski (1998, p.206) highlight the contested nature of the ways to present qualitative findings, 'there is no final answer as to what constitutes goodness in qualitative research, nor to how such goodness might be gauged'. They go on to highlight how this had led to 'a plethora of views and practices' (Emden & Sandelowski 1998, p.206).

Corden and Sainsbury (2006b) undertook a study that specifically explored the ways researchers used their transcripts in the process of writing up. They found a disparity in how researchers presented quotations, with differing views on the purpose of using quotations and the amount to use. They argue that a 'researchers presentation of quotations in their research outputs depends on personal philosophical beliefs (Corden & Sainsbury 2006a, p.108)'. For example, researchers that adopt participatory and action research approaches often including lengthy excerpts from transcripts as a way of recognising the participants' contributions and giving them a voice.

In this thesis the findings chapters include, at times, extended verbatim quotations from the transcript and this is wholly intentional. The purpose of using these excerpts is primarily to highlight key analytical points with direct experiences, but it is also intended to provide the reader

with a sense of the young people, who openly shared their stories of foster care. This is in keeping with an approach adopted by Bourdieu (2000b) in 'the weight of the world' where he published chapters that utilised extensive interview transcripts in order to communicate the experiences of people living in poverty. Holloway (2009) highlights another benefit of this approach by explaining that the use of transcript excerpts can provide textual diversity, which makes the research more interesting for the reader.

The findings chapters that follow in this thesis aim to strike a balance between detail and analysis, by attempting to weave the verbatim quotations from the interview transcripts within a coherent narrative, which is grounded in the analytical framework in order to address the research aims and objectives.

PART 3 Findings

The third part of the thesis presents the findings across three chapters. Chapter 5 highlights findings that show the ways that young people in foster care preserve their relationships and networks. Findings in chapter 6 show how the young people are able to manage their relationships and networks despite the challenges of stigma. In chapter 7, findings demonstrate that young people in foster care persevere and make continual attempts to build their relationships and maintain their networks.

The findings across these three chapters are important as they illustrate how young people in foster care are able to preserve, maintain and build their relationships within their networks, which as a result means they can access their social capital.

Whenever a young person is introduced for the first time in the thesis, relevant details of their biography are included, in order to contextualise the data. Reflections on the interactions during the interview are also considered in an attempt to present a comprehensive and holistic analysis. The research aim and objectives that were stated in Chapter 2, are considered throughout, which serves to highlight how the analytical framework of social capital, has been applied as a heuristic to data.

Chapter 5 The preservation of relationships and networks

Introduction

This chapter presents an analysis of the data that shows how young people in foster care are actively engaged in practices that enable them to preserve their relationships across their social networks. These are important findings, as they show the ways young people keep their access to the relationships they had, and the networks they belonged to, prior to entering care.

This chapter addresses *research objective 1* with findings that show how despite the network disruption that young people experience by coming into care, they attempt to minimise the impact of this and are able to actively manage their pre-existing relationships and networks. The chapter will demonstrate how they achieve this in differing ways. For example, through what could be considered very ordinary practices, in which most of their peer group would engage, such as by using Web 2.0 technologies. Furthermore, findings indicate, that risk can impact on young peoples' ability to engage in these practices, however, they adapt when risk gets in the way, in an attempt to minimise the potential adverse effects on their relationships and networks.

The findings in this chapter also contribute to answering *research objective 2*, as the relationships that the young people in this study worked hard to preserve, primarily offered access to what Putnam (2001) would refer to as bonding social capital. This chapter concludes by presenting data that show, how for some of the young people these acts of preservation also demonstrate their sense of belonging to their birth families and this is expressed with the hopes they held for reunification. This is evidence that addresses *research objective 5*, as it highlights the strong sense of belonging to family that a number of the participants expressed.

Therefore, what follows in this chapter are findings that, show how young people in foster care make ongoing efforts to preserve their relationships and networks (*research objective 1*). This preservation of networks allows them to primarily preserve their access to their bonding social capital (*research objective 2*), which also highlights the sense of belonging (*research objective 5*) a number of the participants expressed towards their birth families.

Ordinary practices in extraordinary circumstances

Nicola is one participant who demonstrates a commitment to maintaining her relationships and managing her networks, which functioned to preserve her access to bonding social capital. Nicola provided a detailed account of how she did this by engaging in what will be shown to be ordinary, or day to day interactions, in the extraordinary circumstances of growing up in foster care. In order to place Nicola's account in context, the following paragraphs include some relevant background details of her life experiences.

Nicola was twelve years old at the time of the interview and the eldest of five siblings, with her youngest brother just turning four years old. She had been living in foster care for four years and was initially placed with one of her brothers Carl, but after a year she was moved from the placement and was placed on her own. Nicola has subsequently had two more placement moves, meaning that during her four years in foster care she has lived with three different sets of carers. When I asked Nicola if she knew the reasons why she came in to foster care she replied:

Nicola: Well basically it was Mum's boyfriend. He was a bit too violent around us and she couldn't cope with him, and he wound her up so much that like if we said something she would snap at us... and we would think we did something wrong so we would get really upset about it and she couldn't really handle us. So we sort of had to come into care.

At the time of the interviews Nicola described how she was seeing her mother every six weeks at supervised contact sessions and how this included contact with her four brothers. However, Nicola said that she was no longer going to meet two of her brothers at the contact sessions because they were being placed for adoption. This was a situation that she had clearly found difficult, and this was reflected in her emotional state during the interview; she was upset and seemed to be on the verge of tears when she spoke about the subject. Nicola described how she had developed a way of coping with the separation from her siblings, saying that she had now come to accept it and that the situation was “*easier*”, because now she does not see them at contact “*it doesn’t keep reminding me that I won’t be seeing them again*”. However, this is a complex scenario and Nicola was not attempting to forget her adopted siblings as she also spoke of the ways that she preserved her relationships with them through processes of memorialisation, using photographs and certain valued possessions such as teddy bears.

Nicola’s physical contact with her family is supervised and arranged by social workers and foster carers. When asked what it was like to have supervised contact with her family, Nicola responded:

Nicola: It’s alright; it’s annoying though because you can’t really have the proper time you want with your family because you have got other people there. So it can be quite uncomfortable.

Outside of these supervised six weekly meetings Nicola actively communicates with these family members, but she also went on to explain how she maintains connections with a range of other people across her social network. For example, the following quotation shows how Nicola stays in contact with her wider family using different methods of communication for different people across her social network:

Nicola: I do talk to my aunties and uncles on the phone sometimes but I mainly like to keep the phone to my Mum and my Nan, and sometimes my

friends but we will mainly BBM (Blackberry messaging) and stuff. So I kind of keep my uncles and aunties to Facebook on the computer because I don't want them to think that I'm not like listening to them, but I kind of leave the phone to my Mum and Nan.

Therefore, this demonstrates how Nicola is not just a passive actor in her social network that is reliant on adults to manage her relationships and to arrange and supervise her contact with her family. In fact, it shows how active she is in managing her own relationships. Nicola is making clear choices about who she contacts and how she does this. For example, she explains how she predominantly keeps the phone for talking to her mother and her grandmother, whereas she uses the computer to contact her aunts, uncles and she sends instant messages to her friends using BlackBerry Messages (BBM). The quotation above from Nicola begins to demonstrate her efforts to manage the important connections in her social network, which serves to preserve her access to social capital. This highlights an important finding, which is that despite the potential constraints that Nicola perceived with the 'uncomfortable' supervised contact, outside of this she was able to adapt, exercise agency and manage the relationships in her network, on her own terms. This is evidence of her ability to engage in what Bourdieu (1986) refers to as 'unceasing sociability'.

At face value, the quotation from the transcript above could reflect the experiences of the majority of young people currently living in the United Kingdom, who make choices about the ways they communicate with the family members, friends and acquaintances in their network. Therefore, it seems that Nicola is engaging in what could be viewed as ordinary practices to manage her relationships with her family and friends. However, it is important to reinforce that the context of Nicola's life means that actually something quite remarkable is occurring. For example, decisions have ultimately been made in the family court, which have resulted in her being removed from her mother's care and placed in public care. Putting to one

side the justifications and the appropriateness of making the decision to place her in foster care, the practice has served to potentially disrupt her closest family relationships, as well as her wider social network. For Nicola multiple placement moves have compounded this potential disruption. So given this context, the ordinary day to day sociability in which she is engaged may well present as being the same kind of interactions as her peers, however, it is important to acknowledge she is able to do this in what is actually an extraordinary set of circumstances.

Nicola went on to speak in detail about how she communicated with her mother, and although she said it was mainly through conversations and messaging on her phone, it was also apparent how Facebook was an important tool that enabled this. Nicola's account of her interactions with her mother on Facebook illustrates how this presented her with both challenges and benefits.

Justin: Do you post photos and stuff on there as well?

Nicola: Yeah sometimes, not very often though.

Justin: You're mainly on there chatting with people?

Nicola: Yeah

Justin: Are you sharing pictures of One Direction with your friends?

Nicola: My Mum does most of the sharing of pictures.

Justin: Oh your Mum does.

Nicola: I was so embarrassed when she put my baby pictures on there.

Justin: Did she?

Nicola: She posted it to my wall and then everyone started like looking at me when I got to school. And I know I wasn't on Facebook that night. They looked at me. I ran over and asked them what they was looking at me for, they

said "Is Danni your Mum?" and I said "Yeah" and they said "Did you know she's posted baby pictures of you on Facebook?" I could have killed her. I was so embarrassed.

Justin: *So what did you do?*

Nicola: *I went home and called her and I did have a little bit of a go at her.. And we kind of left it at that. Now everyone just gets over it. But they're still on there.*

Justin: *She didn't take them down?*

Nicola: *No*

Justin: *You couldn't un-tag yourself in those photos?*

Nicola: *I can but they'd still be on my wall so it's a bit of a waste of time*

It could be perceived that her mother was in this instance causing embarrassment, and that this would result in her distancing herself from her daughter. However, this could also be viewed as an act of inclusivity that demonstrates a strong connection, a bond between a mother and her child. The baby photo was on some level embarrassing for Nicola, but she could have asked her mother to take the photo down, or she could have expressed her opinion of displeasure on Facebook with a comment underneath the photo. However, she chose not to, which suggests that this baby photo story actually serves to reinforce to Nicola the strength of the relationship she has with her mother. The story symbolises that, like her peers she also has a mother; her mother cared for her as a baby, and her mother like everyone else's mother could embarrass her in her teenage years. Reflecting on this interaction there was no reticence from Nicola in telling me this embarrassing story, she brought it up willingly and seemed pleased that she was able to tell me an anecdote about her mother.

As the conversation with Nicola continued she discussed further the complexities of being 'friends' with one's mother on Facebook:

Justin: *I suppose that's the thing, when you've got your friends on there and your family on there. It could be complicated.*

Nicola: *Yeah, my friends sort of add my Mum as if they know her. It's quite scary because Nicola and Dawn they do know my Mum. Chantelle doesn't. But Nicola and Dawn do because I've kind of grown up with them so they talk to my Mum and I didn't know what they're talking about, so it kind of like annoys me because I want to know what they're talking about, and if they're talking about me or something.*

Justin: *Do you ever ask them?*

Nicola: *I do normally go to them in the morning like it's normally the first thing I say to them. "Have you been talking to my Mum on Facebook?" This morning I walked in school, and because they're so used to me saying that, when they walked in and they went "I haven't been talking to your Mum." So now they sort of just automatically say if they have or they haven't.*

Justin: *So when they have, what sort of stuff have they spoken to her about?*

Nicola: *They haven't really told me but they just say that they have general conversations, so I hope that's not involving me; saying what I do at school and stuff.*

Justin: *So like when you had that disagreement with that boy – what was his name Craig?*

Nicola: *Yes*

Justin: *So you're hoping that they're not telling your Mum about it? Has that ever happened when your Mum said "Oh I know what you've been doing." or something like that?*

Nicola: *Yes, she called me one night and it was quite obvious my friends have been talking to her and I didn't know. And she called me up and said "What's this I hear about you wanting your belly button pierced?" She went mental.*

Nicola went on to explain how this involvement from her mother was in her words '*annoying*'. However, she then went on to argue that the reason why her friends were allowed a piercing was because '*their mums don't really care, so my Mum obviously does*'. Therefore, despite the limitations that being placed in foster care has had on Nicola's face to face interactions with her mother, the work Nicola has put in to adapt to the circumstances has had its benefits as the interactions serve to reassure Nicola that she is still cared for by her mother. Adapting to these circumstances has also meant that she has developed ways outside of the 'uncomfortable' formal contact sessions to preserve her relationship with her mother, and along with being able to talk on her mobile phone she described how valuable Facebook is in enabling this. As the transcript excerpts above suggest this has not always been a totally straightforward adaptation, she has had disagreements and arguments with her mother about baby photos and piercings. Arguments and disagreements between a teenage girl and their mother could well be viewed as commonplace and even described as an ordinary interaction. However, given these set of circumstances, where Nicola's physical contact is constrained, arranged and supervised by social workers; her ability to continue to interact with her mother in such ordinary practices is significant.

Other participants also gave examples of how they were actively involved in practices to preserve their relationships within their social networks, which in turn can preserve access to important stocks of social capital. They like Nicola often engaged in these practices of preservation through seemingly commonplace interactions again in quite extraordinary contextual circumstances. Some of these contextual circumstances presented as being extraordinary because of the potential risks that were involved. For example, Jade who was 14 years old at the time of the interview, had been in care for four years, a year prior to this her mother had died. Jade had four different placements in the four years she was in care and had recently been informed that she would be moving again, as she was in a '*bridging placement*'.

Jade explained the ways that she preserved a relationship with a valued friend in her network. Jade lived next door to Sharon in one of previous placements; she explained that they had a very close relationship, describing it as being “*like sisters*”. They used to see each other every day, they walked to school together and they sat next to each other in the same class. Jade’s move to a new foster placement, a considerable distance from her friends, had disrupted this relationship and stopped her from seeing her friend. Jade went from seeing Sharon every day to not having seen her at all during the two months since her placement move. The following excerpt shows how despite the physical distance Jade is working to preserve that friendship:

Justin: So Sharon is in school at the minute and you’re not at school at the minute, so when she is home from school is that when you start chatting on Facebook.

Jade: Yep pretty much, I spend my day waiting for other people to come home from school so I can get on Facebook to chat to them

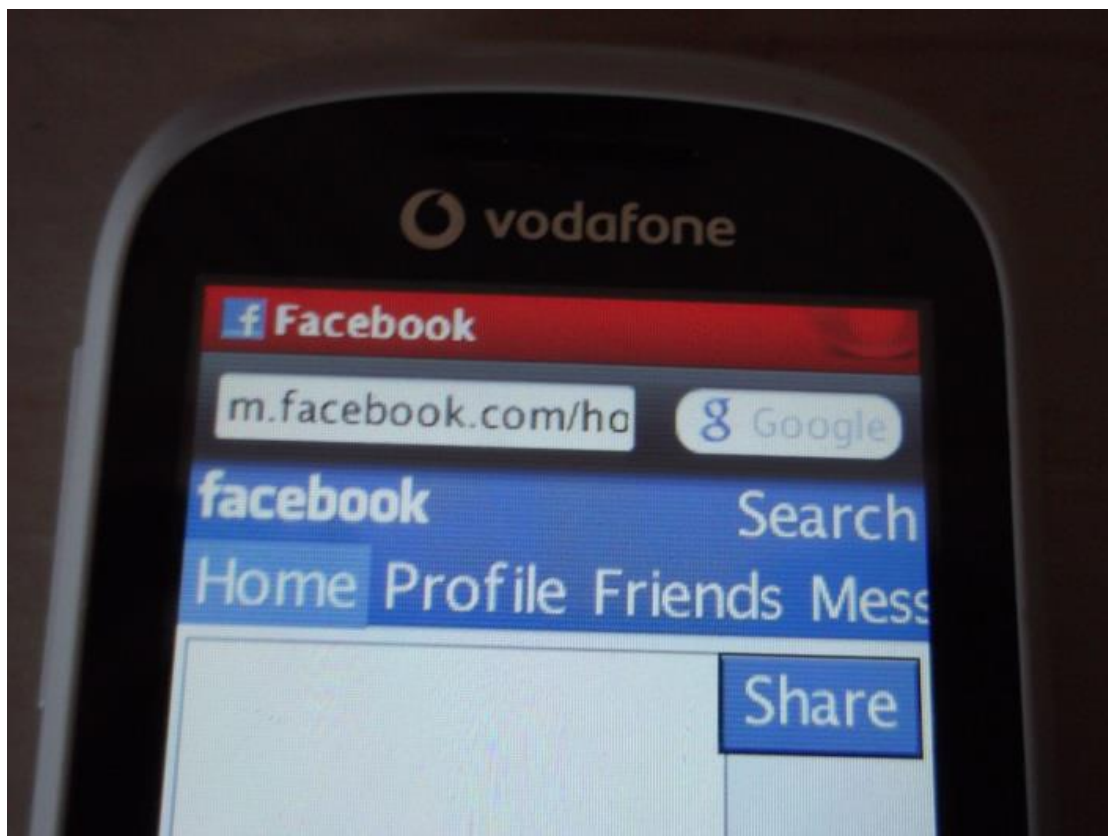
Justin: Right so Sharon she is one of your good friends, so how often do you see her now?

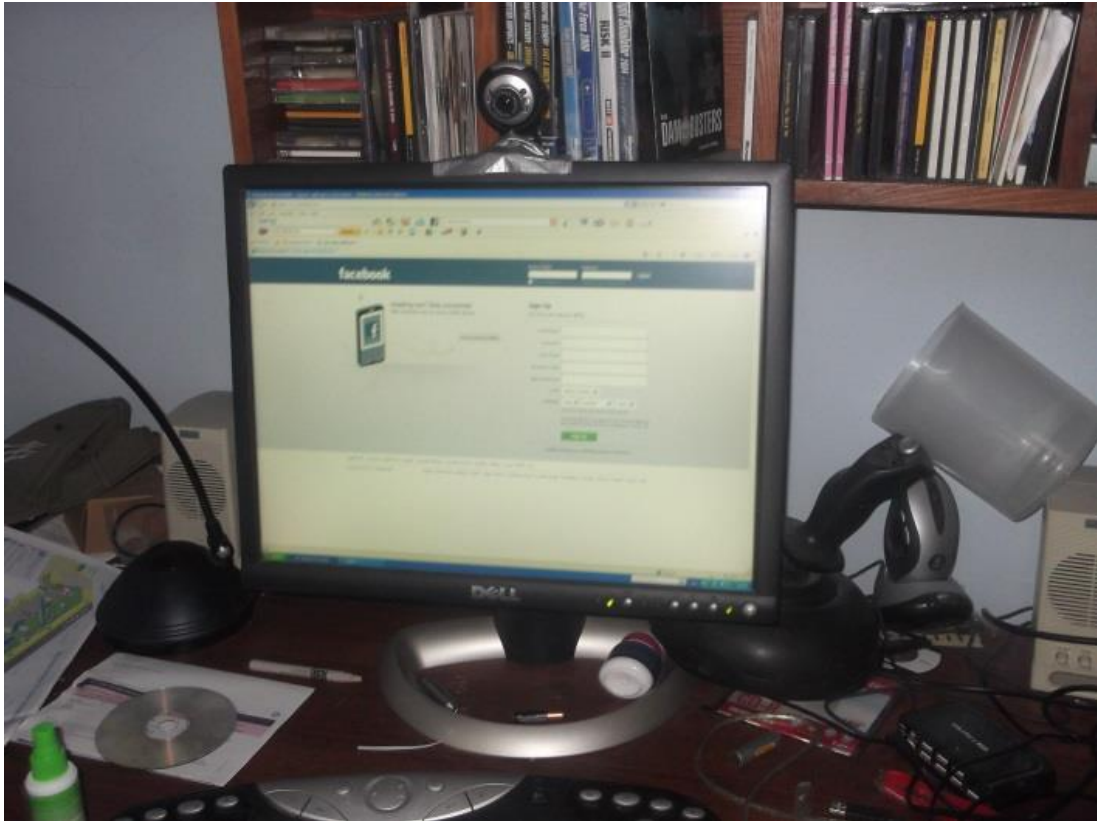
Jade: Not that often, I don’t see her, but Facebook helps me stay in touch with her.

The quotation ‘*I spend my day waiting for other people to come home from school*’ really reinforces the importance that Jade places on interacting with her friends. These relationships are so important to her that even when she is not interacting with her friends, they are still at the forefront of her thoughts as she spends her day waiting to talk to them. For Jade, Facebook is a key tool that enables her to preserve her friendships and relationships across her social network. As a result of her placement move she was also waiting to attend a new school. Therefore, this new placement had significantly disrupted her social network, meaning she no longer saw any of her friends connected to her previous placement including friends

connected to her previous school. This has had an impact on the relationships with the very people that are so important to her that she spends her day waiting for them '*to come home from school*' in order to interact with them. These important friendships represent the emotional support in her social network and serve as a resource of bonding social capital that Jade is clearly working to preserve. As such these are important findings that address **research objective 2**, as they provide evidence that young people in foster care are engaging in practices that enable them to preserve their access to bonding social capital.

Facebook was key a medium that enabled them to do this and it seemed that having access to it, meant having access to relationships that otherwise could have been difficult to maintain. The value that the young people placed in Facebook is encapsulated by another young person Becky who presented the following series of photographs. The young people were asked to take ten photographs of things that were important to them and out of Becky's ten photographs three of them related to Facebook. What follows is a picture of Facebook on her phone, a picture of her netbook that she uses for Facebook and a picture of the foster carer's desktop pc, about to be logged in to Facebook.





Returning to Jade, in the following excerpt she goes on to explain how she is active in preserving a relationship with one of her previous foster carers. Jade explained that she lived with Kate for just over a year, moving on from this placement through her own choice, stating she did not want to live there anymore, as she was not getting along with her carer:

Justin: So do you still speak to Kate?

Jade: Yeah she rings and I speak to her all the time on Facebook,

Justin: Facebook, oh so your carers are on Facebook as well?

Jade: Yeah

Justin: So do you share the same sort of stuff with your carers on Facebook as your friends

Jade: No way! (Laughs)

Justin: So can you set it up in a certain way so you share certain stuff with your friends and certain stuff like with your carers?

Jade: Yeah it's like privacy settings you select which ones you don't want to see you and set that setting to it so they don't actually have to see it!

Justin: That's clever isn't?

Jade: Yeah so you can use it to stay in touch with people who are important to you even if you don't want them to see all your photos like your nights out with friends or whatever

The excerpt above highlights the nuances of these practices that Jade engages in. It shows how through the privacy settings, she is selecting what to share with different people and as a result how she communicates with them in different ways, this is evidence of how she is actively managing this process. Jade is in fact making sophisticated choices. Jade's account also demonstrates that young people in foster care are working on relationships across their social networks not just relationships with family, but also carers and friends.

Preserving relationships and networks when risk gets in the way

The findings in this section demonstrate how risk can impact on these practices to preserve relationships, and how young people in foster care adapt to overcome these challenges. For example, Jade explained that she was not able to see another one of her close friends, Lucy, stating the reason why she was prevented from seeing her is because Lucy has "*problems using drugs... she takes heroin*". Jade said that in her previous placement she used to see Lucy frequently and described how when things "*got too much*" for her at school she would often go and spend the afternoon at Lucy's place. From a social worker and foster carer's perspective one could understand how this relationship could be of concern, it is laden with potential safeguarding issues and occurs in a societal context that is considered as being preoccupied with risk (Beck 1992). Therefore, it is perhaps understandable

that the adults involved in Jade's care were reluctant to allow her to meet up with Lucy. However, from listening to Jade's account, it highlights the need to be careful about pathologising such situations because Jade's relationship with Lucy could be understood as an entirely normal adaptive process. Although one can understand adults focusing on the perceived risk factors, for Jade her relationship with Lucy was beneficial, it provided emotional support and as such it served as a form of bonding social capital. The limitations in trying to prevent contact, in an increasingly technologically connected world, are also evident as despite not being allowed to physically meet with Lucy; Jade was actively preserving her relationship at a distance through mobile phones and Facebook.

Justin: ... and Lucy she is a bit older than you?

Jade: Yeah

Justin: So how do you stay in touch with her now?

Jade: Facebook again (laughs) ... and when my Dad is down there I speak to her on the phone

Justin: But you don't really get to see her anymore?

Jade: No

Justin: So there are some people who you don't see any more but when I asked you if they were important to you, you put them down (on the eco map) almost straight away

Jade: Yeah, they are the people who are most important to me even though really I don't ever see them.

This not only highlights the value that Jade places on her friendship with Lucy but also more generally that from her perspective, the most important people in her social network, were not necessarily those that she saw every day. For example, her current carers were absent from her eco-map, yet by

contrast family and friends, such as Lucy, that represented a link to her past were privileged as being the most important people. Jade shows that despite multiple moves and disruption to friendships she actively works to build on the enduring relationships with people in her network. These enduring relationships from her past are with people whom she shares a degree of homogeneity, the people she feels a sense of belonging as such they are an important source of bonding social capital. It is therefore understandable and perhaps an entirely normal response for Jade to maintain contact with Lucy and it is further evidence of the ability of young people in foster care to maintain the ordinary in extraordinary circumstances. Jade's account shows that for some young people in foster care there are added complexities and challenges for them to negotiate and overcome in order for them to engage in practices, which serve to preserve their access to social capital.

Chrissie is another participant who provides a further example of young people's need and ability to adapt when concerns of risk get in the way of preserving access to social capital. Chrissie's foster carer informed me that Chrissie had experienced sexual and physical abuse from her parents and at the time of the interview was not having any form of contact with them. She was twelve years old and in a confidential placement, constrained about what she could tell people at school about being in foster care. The reality of living in this context and how it can impact on day to day interactions is highlighted in the following excerpt:

Chrissie: *This one girl, Simone she tried to get to know where I live... She almost pinned me against the wall and said "Oh come on, tell me, so I can come and visit you," and I am like, "No." I go, "could you just be quiet?" And then she says "why" and I say "you're not supposed to know where we live."*

Justin: *So do any people know where you live?*

- Chrissie:** No. Apart from Sarah's family. (Foster carer)
- Justin:** What about your friends?
- Chrissie:** They know I am in foster care and some know I am in this town but they don't know the address where I am.
- Justin:** Right, ok, why is that, why don't you tell people?
- Chrissie:** Because we're not allowed... Because obviously my Dad lives in the town near my school so it's just for those reasons really.
- Justin:** Right. So is your Dad not allowed to know where you live?
- Chrissie:** No. Because you know what Dads are like when you go and live somewhere else like foster care they would try and find out where you are and get you or something... And that first night when I came here, I had a dream about that, my Dad coming to the house and taking me and it really frightened me. So I went down stairs and I told Sarah and we had a cuddle and she let me stay up for an hour.
- Justin:** Right, right. Sounds to me like when you have had a bit of a scrape at school Sarah has helped you with it and like when you have been upset about your Dad, it seems like you've got someone to go to, Sarah.
- Chrissie:** Yeah Sarah is like proper good and she is trained to do it as well.

In the quotation above, Chrissie expresses her fears of her father coming to her placement and how she was actively involved in trying to keep her placement details confidential. She worked to keep this confidentiality even amongst her closest friends at school. In Chrissie's case it seems the open and direct support and advice that she received from her social worker and carers meant she understood and accepted the need to keep her placement confidential. This understanding of the need for

confidentiality means Chrissie was committed to actively managing the information she shares amongst the people in her network. The excerpt above begins to illustrate how competent and skilful she was in keeping things confidential.

Chrissie went on to describe the ways in which the need to maintain confidentiality impacts on her day to day to life. For example, she stated that her social worker had asked her not to use Facebook, explaining to her that it may allow her father to identify where she is placed. Chrissie accepted this and she told me that she was not on Facebook but that it was something she wanted to use to stay in touch with her friends. Being prevented from using Facebook could have a potentially significant impact on Chrissie's ability to preserve and manage her relationships, as in the previous accounts from Jade and Nicola it was an important tool that enabled them to preserve their relationships and indirectly their access to social capital.

Chrissie had undergone the shift from her mother and father being her primary carers for ten years of her life, to a situation where significant concerns about her welfare meant she was not in any contact with them, apart from receiving updates about how they were doing from her social worker. This is a complex situation and the need for Chrissie to keep confidentiality also impinged on her ability to be open when it came to discussing her family with her friends. The effect of this complex situation is evident in the following excerpt from a part of the interview with Chrissie when she was completing her eco map:

Justin: *So what's next?*

Chrissie: *I don't know. Yeah, I'll eat a biscuit for a minute but you'd have to be quiet...*

Justin: *Ok, so you have put your Mum and Dad on there, but you're sort of hiding it a little bit. And now you can't talk because you have a biscuit in your mouth! All we're going to hear on the tape is nom nom nom Chrissie*

munching biscuits. So you have put your Mum on there and your Dad. Tell me about your mum.

Chrissie: *She's doing well.*

Justin: *Okay, and Dad?*

Chrissie: *Fine*

Justin: *So tell me about your Mum and Dad.*

Chrissie: *I love these pens. Where did you get these pens?*

At the time I felt this part of our interaction was particularly tense and she presented as being uncomfortable talking about her family. Chrissie had been chatting enthusiastically and openly about the people in her network, predominantly her carers and their family, until her family and specifically her parents were mentioned, and at this point she became quiet. She then evaded conversation by placing biscuits in her mouth, making it clear it was a topic that at that time she did not want to talk about with me. She also made a physical barrier limiting my view of what she was drawing, by shielding it with her hand. The preceding excerpt also shows how Chrissie was able to use her verbal skills to skilfully direct the unwanted topic of our conversation from being about her parents to the pens on the table.



The photo above shows the section of Chrissie's eco map where she drew her Mother and Father. Due to confidentiality the whole eco-map could not be reproduced here as it has a wealth of identifying information.

However, if you were able to look at this segment in its full context, as a small part of a wider network map, it is striking how her Mother and Father appear to be privileged. They are in the most colourful circles and along with her younger brother they are the only circles that contain drawings, in fact portraits of the people that she described as the most important to her.

Chrissie was clearly uncomfortable about speaking about her parents yet these colourful portraits, in which they appear with smiles, suggests a strong relational bond in spite of the current contact restrictions and the abuse and neglect that she experienced living in their care. This form of attachment that a victim of abuse or neglect may feel towards a perpetrator is not uncommon and this has been documented in the child protection literature (Howe 1999; Reder & Duncan 2001).

In relation to social capital, the family, and parents in particular play a significant role in providing a source of bonding social capital (Putnam 2001) and from a Bourdieusien perspective they are crucial in the transmission of capital from generation to generation. Therefore, these perceived significant

risks factors and the subsequent confidential placement has presented Chrissie with challenges in preserving access social capital. Her inability to meet or speak with her parents and also her inability to speak openly and freely about them has resulted in her having to adapt and locate another source of bonding social capital other than her parents. Chrissie has achieved this by developing what appeared to be very close connections with the members of her foster carer's family. For example, in the earlier quotation from the transcript Chrissie spoke positively about her carer Sarah, at a different point in the interview she also described a close relationship with the carer's eldest daughter Lizzy, who was a nurse, and in Chrissie's words a 'really good listener'.

For young people in foster care practices that facilitate access to social capital occur within a complex context, often alongside concerns about child protection and risks. For example, Chrissie's confidential placement resulted in restrictions on parental contact and Jade also had restricted contact due to her older friend's heroin use. With these different, yet similarly complex experiences, Chrissie and Jade have both found different ways to adapt. Jade was able to preserve her relationship with Lucy with the help of social media, despite the concerns of risk. However, for Chrissie the risk was seemingly too great and it got in the way of her ability to maintain relationships with her parents, and because of this she had to develop relationships within her new foster care social network. Therefore, despite the challenges, these processes of adaption show how both Jade and Chrissie are managing relationships in their networks (research objective 1), which provides them access to sources of bonding social capital.

A sense of belonging: preserving relationships for the hopes of reunification

This section of the chapter highlights how some of the participants appeared to be preserving their relationships and their networks, where their

access to social capital exists, for a purpose. The following excerpt from Nicola's interview shows how she is preserving her relationships, particularly with her Nan and Aunt with an eye to the future. The following excerpt was her response when I asked her about her hopes and aspirations:

***Justin:** Do you know what you want to do when you leave care?*

***Nicola:** Well I know that when I'm 16 I can ask to go back with my Mum and they'll run like a check on her, or if I want to go live with my Nan or something, or a member of family, they run a check on them and see if they're safe enough. And then they do the court hearing again. And then like if they don't get approved then I have to wait until I'm 18 because then I have to leave care anyway. But if I want to go home or if I want to go live with my Nan or my aunties or someone, I have to get them checked and stuff. So if the court say 'yes', I will be able to go live with them when I'm 16.*

***Justin:** So you would like to live with your Auntie?*

***Nicola:** Yes, I think I want to go live with my Auntie because I've lived with her before for a short of period of time and she was like, I trust her, I want to live with her. I do with my Mum but I'm kind of scared that what happened before would happen again, so I'd rather live with someone else.*

In this conversation Nicola expresses her desire to return to her family once she is older, she acknowledges the difficulties in her relationship with her mother and she does not envisage going back to live with her. However, she still has a clear wish to go back and live with her grandmother or her aunt. There may be an element of fantasy in this account, her description of a process that involves a return to court to determine her placement when she is sixteen, does not reflect common practice within family placement social work in the United Kingdom. However, for Nicola even if these future plans are imagined they serve as an important way for her to manage and cope with her separation from her family, with hopes for a future reconciliation. This highlights how Nicola perceives that her family, who are at the centre of

her social network, will be a resource to draw on in the future. The notion that social relationships can be a resource is at the heart of Bourdieu (1986), Coleman (1988) and Putnam's (2001) conceptualisation of social capital. Given Nicola's experience of neglectful parenting from her mother, she expresses a reluctance to return to live with her. However, by her actively preserving relationships with wider family members in her network she is able to maintain hope of a family reunion on leaving care.

A number of the other participants expressed similar hopes to return to their family on leaving care. For example, Dean offered the following response when he was asked about his future aspirations.

Dean: I want to see Mum more, and when I leave care at sixteen I want to go back to live there because I sometimes miss my friends from there.

At the time of the interview Dean was twelve years old, he has five siblings and his eldest brother had left care and returned to live with his mother. His brother's experience of reuniting with their mother served as a blueprint for Dean and allowed him to imagine and hope for a future reunion himself. This short quotation not only suggests the strength of attachment and the importance that Dean places on his relationship with his mother; it also shows the importance of the friends he had that live near his mother. Dean had been in care for four years, and lived away from these friends, but the importance of these friendships form a part of his wish to return to the area. This demonstrates that the disruption of relationships in foster care can go beyond the familial. For Dean the disruption was felt across a range of relationships in his social network including his friends.

In chapter 2, sense of belonging was discussed as a key theme from the literature on social capital and developed into *research objective 5*. Dean provides an example of how complex the notion of belonging can be for young people in foster care. He is placed in a long term foster placement the purpose of which is to provide him with a sense of permanence and a foster

family to which he can belong. Dean spoke favourably of his placement he enjoyed days out and his weekly trips to the football. However, when he was asked about the most important people and places in his life he omitted any connections to the foster family and instead he described in detail those linked to his family home and his neighbourhood prior to entering care two years previous. The following quotation highlights this, it started with a discussion about his foster carer's house and it goes on to show the strength of belonging he feels to his family, friends and his old neighbourhood. This can be understood, in Bourdieusien terms, as being where Dean's cultural, economic and social capital combined with his ingrained habitus determines the field position he belongs in, the social space where he feels natural 'like a fish in water':

Dean: Yeah. I'm just happy we've got a big house.

Justin: Yeah it is a big house isn't it, a big detached house. How does that compare to where you were living before? With your Mum?

Dean: My Mum's house was a bit big because it had three floors as well. It was a three story house.

Justin: Does your Mum still live there?

Dean: I think so.

Justin: when you say it's on three floors, is there a garage downstairs? Like a townhouse.

Dean: Yeah.

Justin: Cool, so you've got a good memory of what it was like? Do you ever get to see it, have you ever driven by it or anything like that since you moved here?

Dean: No. But I see it on Google maps though.

Justin: You look on Google maps. What does it look like on there?

Dean: It looks like nothing's changed.

Justin: When is the last time you did that, would you say?

Dean: I do it at school quite a lot. I did it yesterday in the library at school

Justin: Yeah?

Dean: Just to see if it's changed and stuff and because I go on street view I go from this house here, and then I just get to our Mum's house.

Justin: Oh right, so you sort of track the route back to your Mum's. And can you do it; can you do it all the way?

Dean: Yeah. I know now about five different ways to get to Mum's house.

Jack was another participant who also expressed a desire to reconnect with his family on leaving care. Jack was thirteen years old and his history in public care was complex. Jack had been in care since he was four years old; at the time of the interview he had had a total of eight family placements. He was placed for adoption at the age of seven with his younger brother. This adoptive placement subsequently broke down and whilst his brother remained with his adoptive parents, Jack was returned to foster care. This is how Jack explained his care experience to me:

Jack: "I've been in care, well, I was in care when I was like four years old/five years old, about then, then I got adopted when I was seven because up until then I was moving foster carer to foster carer. Then I got adopted and was there for like four years, nearly five, then got kicked out. And then went to my adopted Dad's brother, because his girlfriend's a foster carer. Then I didn't get along with her so I got kicked out again and then I came here."

So Jack had lived with his birth family for the first four years of his life, and then had no contact whatsoever with them for the next eight years

of his life. Despite this lack of contact the following text highlights how important his sense of belonging to them is to him.

Justin: *So do you think like at some point you'd like to try and catch up with some of your family again?*

Jack: *Yeah, when I'm like 18, I'm going to start because I've seen these programmes where people, like kids in care want to see their parents and that. And I want to do that. I want to go see my Mum. I want to go to see my Stepdad. I want to see Jake. I want to see Matt. But I just need help finding them.*

Justin: *Right, yeah. So with this life story book, there's loads of information here, but is there stuff that you still want to find out?*

Jack: *It's like pretty much the full picture but there are still little bits that I'd still like to know about? I want to meet, my grandma.*

Justin: *Right.*

Jack: *The main person I want to meet is my grandma and then my Mum. Because my grandma, she knows loads of stuff, that I just want to know.*

Justin: *Right. So you think she'd be able to tell you what you want to know.*

Jack: *Yeah I want to get some information and see my mum. But I've had thoughts when I'm older, I used to think what if my Mum doesn't recognise me, because what if she thinks I'm just joking around, that I was a random person going up to her. So I was like, I need proof that she'll know me and then obviously I will go like, "Yeah, my name's Jack Allen Brown, little brother Shane Brown." And then she still might not believe me because she might think I'm joking around and then I would say, "Daryl, I don't know his last name, he's my older brother, you've had a baby called Rio because it's in my life story book." And then I just want to figure it out.*

Justin: So you've like imagined that situation?

Jack: Yeah, that she won't believe me, because I was a good liar, I was great at lying, but nowadays I'm not.

Justin: But, don't you think if you're telling her all that information she'll believe you wouldn't she?

Jack: Yeah.

Justin: Yeah, it seems like it is important stuff for you to know all about it, isn't it?

Jack: Yeah

Justin: I'm glad you got this life story book. (See Footnote)

Jack: Yeah, I'm glad I have it because I have never seen my Dad or my little brothers. I want to change my name back to Brown.

Justin: Oh so you think you're going to do that?

Jack: Yeah

Justin: Why is that?

Jack: I think my lives been changed because of adoption but I want to live my real Mum's family name on.

Despite the ways that adults have intervened in Jack's life placing him in foster care, then with adoptive parents and then back to foster care, he still demonstrated that he has a strong sense of belonging to his birth family. The process of adoption had stopped his contact with his birth family, by the end of his adoption breakdown it had also separated him and stopped contact with all three of his siblings. The interventions he experienced were intended to rescue him from the risks posed to him by his birth family and for him to find a sense of belonging with an adopted family. The conversation above highlights how the intended rescue may have occurred on a physical level by

restricting contact, however, it also demonstrates that on an emotional level Jack's sense of belonging rests with his birth family. The strength of this belonging is symbolised in his wish to change his surname back to that of his birth mother as his desire to live his '*real mum's family name on*'.

It is interesting to compare Jack's experiences with Nicola who was interacting with her mother on a daily basis, albeit from a physical distance. Jack was living in a complex situation, where his contact and connection to his birth family and his adoptive family had been disrupted, in fact severed at the age of four. This subsequent disruption to his social capital did not mean his bonding capital within his birth family had disappeared. In fact, for both Nicola and Jack their bonding social capital, like most others, was to be found within their birth family. However, in Jack's situation his bonding social capital was at that time imagined and yet still felt on an emotional level. Jack presented his bonding social capital as a resource that was lying dormant and on a psychological level he was waiting, imagining and planning in detail for it to be resurrected. Therefore, despite the intended aims of the adoption and the power of the state to intervene and sever relationships, Jack still held a desire for a reunification with his birth family.

These findings highlight the power of the construct of the family as a source of belonging and as a key site in the transmission of social capital. Bourdieu argues that the family is at the heart of the practices of capital, in both its economic and symbolic forms. Bourdieu (1984, p.66) explained that practices of capital are passed on through a process of "total, early, imperceptible learning, performed within the family from the earliest days of life." The findings from these young people in foster care, who were removed from their birth families, support the supposition that these practices of capital transmission are influenced in the "earliest days of life" and continually reinforced through ongoing practices. Even when children were separated from their family with restricted contact, the construct of family and early life experiences hold a power that continues to influence

their social capital. For the young people in this study the birth family in varying degrees remain at the heart of their social capital; family presented as being at the centre of their homogenous grouping, the people with whom they belong, their bonding social capital. This is evident when one considers how Nicola worked daily at maintaining her relationships with a range of family members; how Dean imagined that like his older brother he would return to his family on leaving care; and how Jack imagined that his severed family relationships, his bonding social capital active in his imagination, was in a physical sense lying dormant awaiting resurrection on leaving care. These young people's experiences illustrate how social networks from the earliest days of their lives are a resource to draw on. Despite the interventions that have disrupted their social network and resulted in the experience of loss, some of the young people still envisage a return to the family, to the centre of their networks, where they belong.

The thanatological literature, which focuses on death, loss and bereavement, offers a way of understanding the strength that some relationships can hold even when they are at a physical distance. The notion of continuing bonds (Klass et al. 1996; Valentine 2008) is useful here as it recognises that even when the most permanent form of loss, a bereavement, ends a relationship on a physical level, yet, on an emotional level relationships are not something to grieve and get over, but in fact the bonds of that relationship are felt and continue in the present. Therefore, whether the young people's hope for reunification come into fruition, or not, is largely immaterial during their time in care, as it is the process of hoping and planning to return to family which serves to reinforce bonds and allows them to continue. These bonds serve to function as a useful source of emotional support and as such represent a foundation of bonding social capital. A Bourdieusien perspective highlights how these practices of capital are influenced early on in life, it also shows how people have a desire to be around those that share the same habitus as them and who inhabit similar field positions. The young people in this study who had a hope of

reunification, hoped for a return to a social space where they no longer feel 'a fish out of water'. They longed for a return to where they belong, with the people who are like them, their family and friends with whom they share a degree of homogeneity and back to a field position where their habitus and their stocks of capital fit, where they feel natural, 'like a fish in water' and where they express their sense of belonging (*research objective 5*).

Conclusion

In summary this chapter has presented data that shows how young people in foster care are able to engage in what seem to be ordinary practices in exceptional circumstances, which preserves their access to bonding social capital. It has also shown that when these exceptional circumstances present as barriers, getting in the way and affecting a young person's ability to preserve their access to capital, they are able to adapt and improvise in order to continue to draw on resources in their social network.

In relation to the research objectives these findings identify the ways that young people in foster care are managing the relationships in their social network (*research objective 1*) in order to access their bonding social capital (*research objective 2*). Furthermore, in their accounts the young people also express a strong sense of belonging (*research objective 5*) to their families and this is exemplified in the data where the young people expressed their hopes for reunification.

Overall, this chapter demonstrates that existing networks matter, they consist of affective bonds with people that are of importance to the young people and they can represent an important stock of bonding social capital. The participants show in a variety of ways that their established relationships never go away, no matter the disruptions or the barriers and how their social networks are the foundations on which they build their access to social capital. This has implications for policy and practice, which

are discussed in detail in chapter 8 that considers how to enable children and young people in foster care to best develop and build their access to social capital from their existing networks.

Chapter 6 'In care': Stigma and its impact on social capital

In this chapter, findings highlight the challenges that young people in foster care face by having the stigmatized status of being 'in care'. In the UK this is a commonly used term for children and young people living in foster care or residential care arrangements. The young people in this study appear to intuitively understand this stigmatized status and in this chapter examples are provided of how, on occasion, it causes difficulty in their interactions with their peers in their social networks. However, the young people also provide examples of how they work hard to overcome these difficulties and manage their stigmatized identity in order to maintain their networks, which subsequently preserves their access to social capital.

The analysis shows the value that the young people place on peer support and the reciprocally supportive relationships they had with their fostered peers. These relationships seem to help them to understand and manage their spoiled identities and enable them to turn this into a positive identity to form an 'in-group', which provides a source of bonding social capital. Therefore, the findings in this chapter address research objectives 4 and 5, as they show how young people in foster care express a sense of belonging with their fostered peers and engage in practices of reciprocity with them that provide emotional support.

Findings illustrate how the young people's relationships with their 'in care' peers develop from both adult led formal group sessions, as well as through informal opportunities, that they developed from within their own social networks. The adults involved in the young people's care expressed concerns about the potential risks of anti-social relationships developing. However, the benefits that peer support clearly provides against the stigmatized status of being 'in care', certainly from these young people's account, seems to validate the worth of wherever possible taking that risk.

The status of being 'in care' presented in the data as having both a negative stigmatizing effect on the participants, as well as potentially having what Crocker and Major (1989) refer to as 'self-protective properties' that afforded them some benefits. Therefore this chapter is split into two parts; (1) Trying to belong: the importance of being normal; and (2) The self-protective factors of a stigmatized status. Across these two sections, the analysis shows that the young people are actively managing their stigmatized status, which serves to preserve their access to social capital.

Trying to belong: the importance of being normal

"Looked after children – fostered, adopted or orphaned – [often] grow into their adult lives in fear of speaking of their background, as if it may somehow weaken their standing in the foreground." (Sisay 2012)

Across the interviews, a number of the young people described incidents where their care status had been used against them by their peers. The young people did not overtly describe these incidents as bullying, perhaps due to the potential stigma associated with being seen as a victim. However, they did provide numerous examples of how their 'in care' status was used by their peers, in order to insult and/or exclude them. In relation to the concept of stigma it is useful to consider Goffman's (1969) notions of the in-group and the out-group. In chapter three of his seminal text, notes on the management of a spoiled identity, Goffman charted the various ways that stigmatized people attempt to pass and fit in with the 'normals' within the in-group. The following incidents that the young people shared demonstrate just how much of a challenge it can be to try and pass, in order to belong in the in group, and how this can subsequently affect relationships,

which in turn can subsequently threaten access to social capital. The following excerpt from Nicola's interview describes one such incident where her 'in care' status was used against her at school.

Nicola: *Once I was in an argument with a boy called Steve- we get along fine now – it was just because he thought it was me that said something horrible and it was my friend sat next to me. She joked but she didn't really mean it- she's got a different sense of humour to other people, and she said "At least my mum don't work in the 99p shop", or something like that, because his mum does, and he thought it was me, and because he knows I'm in care, he turned around and said "At least I live with my mum." That got me really angry. I sort of screamed and shouted across the class and got myself a detention."*

This illustrates how the potential exists for young people to be stigmatized and excluded by their peers because of a range of attributes. For Steve, these are attributes that relate to the status of his parents and specifically his mother not having the right job. This can be understood through Bourdieu's wider conceptualisations of symbolic capital and in particular the notion of cultural capital, which ascribes value to different cultural practices. For example, Steve's mother has a job in a shop that is seen as undesirable, which places it low down in the cultural capital stakes for these young people. The specific reference to the 99p shop suggests that perhaps the job would have been more highly regarded and accepted if it had been in a different shop. For example, if Steve's mother was in a retail setting where she was selling clothes for a desirable brand, even if her wages (economic capital) were similar in both stores, her cultural capital in this instance amongst Steve's peers may be regarded as being of more worth. So for Steve his cultural capital or in this instance his parent's cultural capital

has the power to exclude him from the in group, which has a stigmatizing effect with a potential impact on his relationships and his social capital. However, the quotation also highlights that, amongst these young people, on the undesirability scale the thing that trumps having a mother that works in the 99p shop is being 'in care' and having a mother that you cannot live with. For Nicola, her status as being 'in care', presented amongst her peers as being a stigmatizing factor and was a barrier to her becoming a part of the in-group..

The following excerpt from Jack's interview further illustrates how stigmatization can lead to incidents that can threaten a young person's ability to pass and fit in with the in-group. After a conversation about the reasons why Jack entered care he went on to describe the following incident where a boy from his school brought up his 'in care' status. This was used as an insult and he responded with anger and an outburst of aggression and violence:

Justin: *What's that like, living with that Jack, you know, all of that in your past?*

Jack: *I just ... I haven't let it out because if I let it out I'm just going to literally, I admit it, I did hurt someone really badly , like physically because they were saying stuff about my past and I don't like that, and so I let it all out.*

Justin: *What happened there then? Do you mind if I ask what they said?*

Jack: *Yeah, they were saying, "You're in care, your parents didn't love you, they just shipped you into care, they didn't care about you." And I don't like people mentioning my family like that. So I just lashed out, I threw him to the ground went to punch him in the head he moved and I hit him on the collarbone, I actually broke his collarbone.*

The insults that Jack received from his peers assume that his parents do not love or care for him, and that is why he is in care. On this occasion the consequences were significant, for both Jack and the boy who insulted him. Jack expressed remorse for his actions; however, it resulted in him receiving a reprimand from the police and an exclusion from school. This exclusion meant that for a period of three weeks Jack had to attend a pupil referral unit (PRU).

Justin: *You were excluded from school for a bit weren't you?*

Jack: *Yeah, I was in Greenacres.*

Justin: *What was that like down there?*

Jack: *I would rather be there.*

Justin: *Really?*

Jack: *It's great.*

Justin: *What's the difference?*

Jack: *Well my school is a mainstream school and Greenacres a school for naughty kids...all the students there were excluded, but I was just having a break. And yeah, I enjoyed that more because I got along with everyone there.*

Justin: *What was different about it then? Why do you think you got on there?*

Jack: *Yeah. They're a bit softer than normal teachers, it makes a difference. That's why I liked it.*

Justin: *When you say soft, do you mean like more understanding in a way as well?*

Jack: *Yeah, and not as strict.*

Justin: *Right, okay, right, right. So then when you go back to your old school what was that like to go back there again then?*

Jack: *Because it was a Thursday, it was my last day at Greenacres and on the Friday I went straight back. I didn't want to, but I went straight back. And it was too much for me.*

Justin: *Really?*

Jack: *People, some people hated me at that time because they were jealous that I went to a different school. And I was this close to getting into a fight straightaway, but somehow I controlled my anger and walked on. And that day I actually cried, I actually didn't want to be there ... I was still in school, I just didn't want to be in school.*

Justin: *You cried in school, you were upset?*

Jack: *Yeah, I went and I couldn't deal with any of it, I went straight back from Greenacres just down the road, Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays, school ends at quarter past two. Just back to the place where I lost it.*

Justin: *But you're there now, you've stuck with it by the sounds of it.*

Jack: *Yeah, been back two weeks or so, people like me now, because they've seen a different side of me because year seven/year eight, I used to be the naughtiest kid. I used to mess around, that's what people got annoyed with. But now as soon as I came back I had changed..I was messing around in school. As soon as I got back from that Pupil Referral I was fine.*

Justin: *You got sort of back on with work and stuff?*

Jack: *Yeah. People were surprised. Some kids still hate me. They try to get a reaction out of me.*

Jack's exclusion meant that he was removed from his network of relationships at the mainstream school and placed in the smaller setting of the PRU. Jack described this as a positive experience and explained how he quickly settled in the PRU, the reduced hours and its geographical proximity to his foster placement factored into this. However, it is important to highlight how it was relationships that were the key and central to his satisfaction with his time at the PRU. Jack was clear that he enjoyed it more there because he got along with everyone there. His satisfaction with the PRU and the ease at which he made friends is perhaps understandable when one considers that he shared some homogeneity with his new peer group and he seemed to express a sense of belonging to the PRU (*research objective 5*). For example, he was no longer seen as the pupil in the class who is the naughty kid, as in his words the PRU is '*a school for naughty kids*'.

After Jack's positive experience at the PRU and his development of a new supportive social network, he was abruptly removed and placed back at his old school. The transition from one network of relationships to another was clearly upsetting for Jack and his frank and open account of how difficult this was for him highlights the unsettling impact that disruptions in a young person's social network can have.

Despite, or maybe because of the challenges, that young people in care can face due to their stigmatized status, the participants demonstrated how they were active in practices to manage and lessen their stigma. The young people did not present as being passive actors resigned to a fate of exclusion that was determined by having the label of being 'in care'. The young people were actually working hard, like their peers in the ordinary practices of 'unceasing sociability' (Bourdieu 1986) but they also had to negotiate ways to pass and to fit in with the in-group to preserve their access to social capital.

The participants described a variety of ways that they engaged in day to day practices that centered on trying to fit in and belong to their peer group. Some of these practices are similar to their peers and could be seen as normal for adolescents and a part of exploring their personal identity. However, if one considers the risks that a stigmatized status poses, getting these practices right seemed more significant for the participants as their need to belong seemed to be greater. For example, Jack explained in detail his need to have clothing and accessories from what he perceived to be the right brands. Jack liked the clothing brand Fcuk and he took the following photograph of his Fcuk wallet, as a part of the photo elicitation project.



Jack started off by explaining that he did not take the photo because it was a wallet or that it had anything to do with money, but because he liked the brand. For Jack, having access to the right brands was important as he

was acutely aware that, amongst his peer group, some brands were not deemed as desirable as others. In fact, he pointed out that if you were to wear clothing from the brand Lonsdale you would be considered a 'chav'. As Owen Jones (2012) explains, in British society the term 'chav' has become a hate filled word, which is used to describe and stereotype someone who may be deemed to be feckless, criminal or ignorant. Therefore, for Jack it is important to have access to his favoured brands such as Fcuk and the ability to not have to wear Lonsdale products. Having the wrong brand would potentially impact on his appearance and how he is perceived amongst his peers and in turn this could impact on his social capital, as it could influence whether he is accepted within his social network.

Anna was another participant who spoke about the importance of maintaining her appearance to fit in, both in and out of school. Anna described how she came into care from a challenging family lifestyle, with her parents both experiencing difficulties with heroin addiction. The following extended excerpt from the transcript is long, but it is necessary to include at this length as it highlights Anna's experience and provides a context for the analysis that follows. The data comes from the beginning of the first interview with Anna at the point we started to draw her network on her eco-map.

Justin: Do you mind if I ask what was the reason for you coming to foster care?

Anna: Mum and Drugs.

Justin: Right. What, your Mum was taking drugs,

Anna: Yeah

Justin: Do you know what she was doing?

Anna: Heroin.

Justin: Was it just your Mum that you were living with?

Anna: And my Dad.

Justin: Right. And were they both using drugs?

Anna: Yeah, since I was a baby.

Justin: What was that like?

Anna: I didn't really notice it till I got like a bit older. And I started finding stuff and then yeah.

Justin: Yeah, yeah. Did you tell anyone about it?

Anna: Well actually my Mum told ... when she first had me she told the hospital that she'd been using drugs at the start. And then she stopped with me and then started again with my sisters and my brother.

Justin: Right, okay. And did she stop when she had your sisters and your brother as well?

Anna: She didn't, no, no ... my Mum went into labour and then we got taken in care, but we was only meant to be there for like a couple of weeks, then it ended up being a year, yeah.

Justin: right. And do you see your Mum now?

Anna: She's in prison.

Justin: Do you get to see her or speak to her or anything?

Anna: No, I'm going to start writing some letters to her and I'm going to go see her on the 3rd of September.

Justin: Right. What's she in prison for?

Anna: I don't even know. I'm going to ask her when I see her.

Justin: *Right. Has she been caught for doing stuff like, you know criminal stuff before sort of think?*

Anna: *Yeah, shoplifting. To pay for the drugs*

Justin: *Right, right. What do you think about all of that, because you're like 14 years old and you've got all of that going on in your life?*

Anna: *Well I've been brought up with it, so I'm used to it. But I don't think I'd ever do it, because of what I've seen, no way.*

Justin: *No, because of the things you've seen. What's the stuff that you have seen?*

Anna: *Well the worst thing, my uncle, my granddad, they used to sell drugs. And when they got raided like a riot van pulled up and then everyone came through the door, yeah...they wouldn't let me and my sister go out to see my Dad. They had him in the front room.*

Justin: *Right. How old was you then, can you remember?*

Anna: *About 11.*

Anna explained that even though these events were occurring at home she said that people on the outside would never have guessed what was going on. When I asked her if life was difficult when she lived with Mum and Dad she replied: *"Not at all. From the outside no one could even tell what was going on it was normal"*. This suggests that prior to coming into foster care Anna may have had previous experience of being in a family situation where attempts were being made to manage a spoiled identity in this case the stigmatized status of her parent's heroin addiction. Ultimately, these attempts were unsuccessful and her parents' status was exposed, with police at the family home and the children entering public care. Against this chaotic context Anna has been able to develop her own capacity and resources to cope with the stigmatizing effect of being 'in care'. Later in this chapter data

are presented that shows how Anna makes continual attempts to manage her spoiled identity that enables her to preserve her friendships, which in the absence of any significant familial relationship, serve as an important source of bonding social capital for her. During the photo elicitation interview, Anna presented the following photographs that gave an insight into how important maintaining her appearance was to her. For Jack the right brand was an important factor in his appearance and fitting in with their peers. For Anna, maintaining her appearance and the need to fit in was equally important to her. However, the following photographs highlight how for Anna this had added complexity than getting the right brand, and it presented as requiring significantly more work.



Justin: *Smashing. What's all this?*

Anna: *Make-up. I love my makeup. Can't live without it*

Justin: So if I took all that with me when left this evening, and said you had to take all your make-up off, would you still go to the youth club?

Anna: No way.

Justin: You wouldn't go there?

Anna: I wouldn't go out without it on. I wouldn't leave the house!

Anna: No.

Justin: What is so important about having make-up?

Anna: I don't know. I just love make-up.

Justin: Do you?

Anna: Yeah. You just sort of feel better once you've put your make-up on and stuff.

Justin: Right, right. Yeah.

Anna: And getting my hair done and all, that's all important to me. There's a picture of my straighteners on there as well.

These practices that were so important to Anna that she communicated them through her photographs and her detailed descriptions of the photographs were also evident in the accounts from other participants. For example returning briefly to Jade, the following photographs she took highlights the importance that she placed on her hair care products and accessories.



The straighteners in particular not only featured in the display of hair care products on the dresser, but they are so important to her they also warranted a photograph on their own. Again the common message from both Anna and Jade was that they would not leave the house without their hair and make-up done to a standard they were happy with. The following conversation with Anna, which started with a discussion about Facebook, provides an insight that potentially illustrates why this is important:

Justin: Right, right. Do you use Facebook on there as well?

Anna: Ah hm.

Justin: Is that something you use a lot?

Anna: No, I don't like Facebook.

Justin: No, no. What don't you like about it?

Anna: It's just so bitchy. If someone puts a picture up or something because they're in a skirt or a dress, they instantly get called a slag.

This excerpt shows how these practices could potentially lead to exclusion by one's peer group, for example, if one's appearance did not meet the accepted norms. The consequences of Anna getting her appearance wrong and not having the right taste in fashion would expose a lack of cultural capital in this field, which in turn could impact negatively on her peer relationships and her access to social capital.

It is important to highlight that these practices that both Anna and Jade engage in, maintaining their appearances, are again evidence of fostered young people's ability to engage in aspects of ordinary day to day life that concern most other teenage girls. As such, it is another example of young people showing a commitment and drive to carry on and 'live ordinary' in what could be considered the extraordinary circumstances of foster care.

Another participant, Dean, presented as a young person who was working hard to try and fit in with his peers. In order to place Dean's account in context the following excerpt provides an insight into the reasons why he entered public care:

Justin: What were the reasons why you sort of came into foster care, if you don't mind me asking? If you don't mind me talking about it?

Dean: Because I had that problem where I would hurt myself. I was naughty because I ended up hitting my sister. And I was a bit lethal.

Justin: Right. In what ways?

Dean: Every time I got beaten at a game or something, I would just pick something up and throw it at the person who won.

Justin: Right.

Dean: And I used to hit my brothers with weapons.

Justin: Right. What sort of things would you hit them with?

Dean: Chairs, tables.

Justin: So where was all of that sort of stuff happening?

Dean: At home.

Justin: At home? Right and how did it get to the point when you came into care?

Dean: I don't know, my Mum just didn't do nothing really.

Justin: Right. What your mum sort of struggled to look after you did she?

Dean: Yeah.

Justin: Why do you think that was then?

Dean: Well our Mum and Dad split up, so she wasn't getting any money because Dad wasn't with us anymore, and he was the one who worked.

During the photo-elicitation interview Dean presented a photograph of a photograph, it was of him and his elder brother on a daytrip to the seaside, they were standing alongside a boat with one of their foster carers. When I asked Dean about this day out he went on to provide another example of where having the right brand was important, when I asked him the following question about the day out:

Justin: When you were at home with your Mum, did you do this sort of stuff then?

Dean: No.

Justin: You didn't do sort of days out like that. So all of this was new to you when you came into foster care?

Dean: Yeah. Because Mum and Dad split up and Mum didn't have any money, we didn't have a car. And even the shoes that I had they were horrible. They would squish my toes.

Justin: Would they. They were too small for you?

Dean: Yeah

Justin: What trainers have you got now?

Dean: Just these white, black and green ones.

Justin: Are they a certain make?

Dean: Nike.

Justin: Is that important to have Nike trainers?

Dean: Yeah. They are the best

Justin: Are they better than Adidas?

Dean: Yes.

Justin: So what's that like at school if you turned up with trainers that were too small for you? Or say if you didn't have Nike trainers?

Dean: I would be really annoyed.

Justin: And the other kids at school; are they all right if you don't wear Nikes and stuff like that? Say if I got you some nice shoes from Lidl to wear at school, what would the other kids say if you put them on for your PE?

Dean: They would probably make fun of me so it's not happening. I would just send them back to you. I got to have my Nike trainers

Dean's entry in to public care meant he was placed with a family that had access to more economic capital than his birth family. This economic capital afforded him the opportunity to have the right clothes and the right brands, a display of cultural capital which he could not afford when he lived with his mother. This meant that Dean was given some protection from the potentially stigmatizing effect of not having enough money to have the right brands. For Dean, before he entered into care his attempts to fit in with his peers may have been challenged because of his family not having much money, he alludes to this when he describes how they didn't have a car and that his shoes did not fit him. On entering public care Dean was afforded the possibility of having the right trainers, this may have enabled him to fit in with his peers, which could have allowed him to build more relationships and develop social capital. However, despite the potential affordances of entering care, the following excerpt shows how the status of being 'in care' and its stigmatizing effect was experienced and felt by Dean, and how for him this centred on a feeling of not being normal.

Justin: *Are you still seeing your girlfriend, who you told me about last time?*

Dean: *No.*

Justin: *Oh dear, what happened there?*

Dean: *We kind of had an argument. We weren't speaking to each other. So now we are just friends.*

Justin: *Right, you're just friends now. What was it you argued about?*

Dean: *I actually don't know. We just had an argument about something. I'm not even sure now.*

Justin: *I remember you saying that you used to spend time, a lot of time together at school.*

Dean: *Yeah, in the library. She does her homework on the computer and I mostly just sit there on the computer next to her and play games.*

Justin: *Remember I asked you what you liked about her? What was it you said?*

Dean: *Yeah. She is just a normal girl, not in care or nothing, but now I sometimes think she's a bit mad. But then that's normal at my school!*

Dean used the word normal on a number of occasions across the two interviews. He did this in such a way that suggested that he perceived normal to be something to aspire to. For example, when I asked him what he wanted to do once he left school he replied '*I just want a normal job like a lorry driver or something like that*'. In the excerpt above Dean described his ex-girlfriend as normal (for the second time across the interviews), and in this instance he explains that her normality was because she was not in care. This suggests that Dean perceives his own 'in care' status as being in some way abnormal. Goffman (1968) explains the often complex interactions that people living with a stigma have with those without a stigma, who Goffman

refers to as 'normals'. For example, Goffman points out that there are rules that the stigmatized must follow when interacting with 'normals' and they must attempt to pass as normal, in order to put 'normals' at ease. For Dean, he seemed to perceive that having a 'normal' girlfriend and aspiring to have a 'normal' job would help him to pass and fit in. Dean wanted to obscure his stigma as a way of trying to maintain his relationships, which would alleviate threats to his access to social capital.

Nicola provides the following example where she is trying hard to fit in with her peers at school and how, in order to achieve this, she wants to be treated no differently to the other pupils, she wants no extra help and certainly does not want anyone to "fuss".

Justin: What's sort of the good things about school would you say?

Nicola: Friends

Justin: Right

Nicola: Some of the teachers are nice.

Justin: Yeah, are there some teachers that you really get on with?

Nicola: There's my tutor, and there's my geography teacher. He's really nice- Mr Brown.

Justin: What's nice about Mr Brown?

Nicola: He's fun. He makes the lessons fun. The other teachers just play it normally, but he makes the lessons really fun.

Justin: Do you like the subject as well?

Nicola: Yeah, I love English.

Justin: Does he know about your situation, being in foster care?

Nicola: No one really does.

Justin: None of the teachers do?

Nicola: Not really

Justin: What do you think of that?

Nicola: It's kind of helpful. Some of the teachers that do know they like give me extra help when I don't need it. So they think that I need extra help and I don't. It's nice when they don't know.

Justin: You'd rather they didn't know?

Nicola: Yeah

Justin: Why?

Nicola: So they don't fuss over you

Justin: What does it make you feel a bit different almost

Nicola: Yeah, I don't like it when people fuss. It's horrible.

During the photo-elicitation interview with Nicola she presented a photograph of a photograph, it was a professional portrait of her family that she had framed and fixed to the wall in her bedroom. Nicola described how important the photograph of her family was to her, and how contrary to the assumptions of others, who often think it makes her feel sad, it actually makes her happy to see her family together:

Justin: wow that's lovely, where did you get that done?

Nicola: That was in a photography shop I think. The photographer's in town.

Justin: So you went to a proper photographer to get the photo taken?

Nicola: Yeah, then my Nan printed it out for us all and we got a copy of that.

Justin: *How does that make you feel when you see that photo?*

Nicola: *Some people think it really upsets me, but it really doesn't. It makes me kind of happy to see us all together as a family. We do look quite happy except for Dave.*

Justin: *You look really happy. Yeah, you all look really happy. Even Dave has got a bit of a smile ... So some people think that you would be upset by that photo, do they?*

Nicola: *Yeah, some people are like scared to mention my family at school because some of them know about it. But it's kind of weird because like when they are all talking about their family but when I walk over, they won't talk about their family. It's like they're really scared to talk about family in front of me. So it's kind of a bit strange...Even if I know they're talking about their family when I come around they stop. Even my best friends do it...Like they think I'm going to get upset or offended by something. They kind of don't talk about it.*

Justin: *It sounds like they're being sensitive about it. Do you know what I mean?*

Nicola: *Yeah but I have told them I don't really mind if they talk about family around me. It's not going to upset me but they still kind of don't do it. Sometimes you have occasions like Jackie says "Oh I fell out with my Mum." and I just talk normally to her like it's a normal everyday thing because it is, but she gets quite touchy about it.*

Justin: *So she gets touchy about it, but you don't would you say?*

Nicola: *Yeah, because she thinks I'm going to like get angry or upset, that makes me fall out with her, though it doesn't matter how much I tell her. She thinks I'm going to do that.*

Justin: *So like she says "I've fallen out with my Mum." can I ask, do you ever fall out with your Mum?*

Nicola: *Yes*

Justin: *So even though you're not living with your Mum...*

Nicola: *I always fall out with her. I have fallen out with her already this week. She still won't let me get my belly button pierced.*

Justin: *It sounds like the similar sort of stuff your friends would fall out with their mum's about, is that right?*

Nicola: *Yeah, just difference is I don't live with her.*

Justin: *So would you tell them when you're falling out with your Mum?*

Nicola: *They have to pretty much listen to me moan every day. They just laugh at me. They're so used to it.*

Justin: *But I guess they got to listen to you talk about where you fallen out with your Mum or whether you're fallen out with your carer as well...*

Nicola: *yeah and sometimes like they forget and they say 'your Mum' and then they quickly go 'Oh your carer' and then they think that's going to upset me but it doesn't.*

The excerpt from the transcript above highlights how for Nicola being 'in care' makes her different to her peers, and how this can impact on her interactions even with her close and supportive friends. Nicola provides an example here of an interaction between friends that shows how an 'in care' status can present challenges, not only for Nicola but also for her friends who find it a difficult and sensitive topic to discuss with her. Nicola is clear though that she wants her friends to talk about their families, and this is where the word normal reappears in the data "*I just talk normally to her like it's a normal everyday thing because it is*". Nicola presents as a young person

that accepts her 'in care' status, and she provides examples of having to almost coach and support her friends, so they are able to discuss the topic. This was felt by other young people in the study, for example, Anna explained:

Justin: No. Do all your mates know about being in foster care?

Anna: I think they know but they just don't talk about it.

Justin: Right. Why's that, why don't they talk about it?

Anna: I think they think it upsets me.

Anna also reiterated this point when she told me about her boyfriend Tom:

Justin: Right. So you've been going out for about a year then? How's that going?

Anna: Fine.

Justin: Yeah, yeah. Tell me about Tom, what do you like about him?

Anna: Well not his looks, because he's quite chubby and he's got really curly hair. But he's really nice, he's so nice, yeah.

Justin: Right. What's nice about him?

Anna: He's got a really nice personality. He's like, I don't know, he'll stick up for you if you need it or something.

Justin: Right, right. And does he know about foster care and stuff?

Anna: Yeah.

Justin: Do you talk to him about it?

Anna: Yeah. But he doesn't like talking to me because he thinks it upsets me. But apart from that, yeah.

Jade was another participant that found her peers reacted to her care experiences in an awkward way. Jade is coping with the loss of her mother , in the first interview we had a brief conversation about her mother where Jade spoke about her in the present, only to tell me later, when I asked about the last time they saw each other, that *'my Mum is actually dead'*. The following excerpt explains why Jade has a reluctance to disclose to people about her mother's death so that they do not *'feel awkward'*.

Justin: *So have you talked to Stacy or any of your friends about moving placement?*

Jade: *No, she would be just like 'Oh' and then move on to another subject. But James would like ask me those questions like "Are you all right?"*

Justin: *So if you talk to Stacy and she moves on to another subject, what's that like?*

Jade: *It's just quite annoying because you want to talk to her about it but then I feel like she doesn't care. It's just that she doesn't know how to respond and stuff to it and so she thought 'Uhm'.*

Justin: *Is that because some of these things are difficult for people to talk about really.*

Jade: *Yeah*

Justin: *I was thinking last week when you told me about your Mum dying, I was a little bit taken a back, so I can see how it's difficult for people to talk about? Do you find that a lot?*

Jade: *Yeah, it's like sometimes I don't really talk to anyone, because they ask me questions and I don't want to say stuff that will make them feel awkward so I just don't really talk to them.*

Justin: *Right. So you don't want them to feel awkward?*

Jade: No, but they make me feel awkward like saying "What's your Mum and Dad like?" and I'm like "Nice". It is quite awkward.

In this excerpt Jade is describing how she wants to be liked by her friends and how she is attempting to control and manage their feelings in order to make sure she has friends. By doing this Jade is actively managing her relationships in her network, which subsequently maintains her access to social capital.

Returning to Nicola, she likened the responses that she can get from her friends about her care experience to a television advert by the campaigning group Time To Change, which aims to challenge the stigma of mental health in society:

Nicola: It's like that mental health thing, the advert on the television. When that man is sort of scared of what the other persons reaction is going to be if he asks him how he is feeling. It's sort of what they're like. They don't want to ask and they take quite a while to say something about it.

The advert that Nicola is referring to is set in an office, a man passes one of his colleagues, who he knows has been off from work because of a mental health difficulty. The man has an internal dialogue debating whether to ask his colleague how he is feeling; he imagines the responses he will get if he asks the question. The stigma of mental health, results in the man nervously imagining a whole range of outlandish responses, to a straightforward question of how are you feeling. The man was deliberating whether to even talk to his stigmatized colleague and what he should say and what the response would be. At twelve years old Nicola, intuitively recognised the similarities with the scenario in this advert to the way her friends awkwardly respond to her when the mention of family or being 'in care' arises in conversation. The 'Time to Change' campaign argues that talking about the stigmatized status of mental health, can strengthen friendships, the participants in this study provided examples of the ways

that disclosing their care status to their peers had similar benefits and really strengthened their relationships. These findings relate to *research objective five*, as they highlight that the young people identify a sense of belonging to their friends in their network and they work hard to manage their identities to maintain their relationships. This is further highlighted in the second part of this section on stigma, where participants reinforced what Crocker and Major (1989) refer to as the self-protective properties of a stigmatized status.

Self-protective factors

This section highlights how the stigmatized status of being in care can also offer some benefits as there are potentially protective properties that arise from being a member of a stigmatized group. Crocker and Major (1989) challenged empirical research that suggests that members of stigmatized groups inherently have low self-esteem and they highlight how membership can in fact bring about self-protective properties. Jack provided the following example of how being friends with other young people 'in care' provides a sense of belonging that he and his friends equate to the belonging a family provides.

Jack: *There was a girl at school called Jess, she was older than me. And she was in care and me and her, we treat each other like family, so I was her cousin, she's my cousin.*

Justin: *Right. Even though you weren't cousins, you called each other cousins?*

Jack: *Yeah, yeah. And then she's related to a girl called Sharon she is in care as well and they're just down the road, and again we just say, "Yeah, we're family." We're not blood, we just say we are sort of like cousins. We call each other Cuz....*

Justin: *So do you think because you've all been in care you have something in common?*

Jack: Yeah, me and Ricky, he's in care as well. And me and him we just get along, we're two peas in a pod. We're just like best buds.

This excerpt highlights the value that Jack places on his relationships with his friends, who he feels are so close to him that they are family. The closeness he shares with these three friends, who share his stigmatized status, is evident and they were privileged above his other friends, by virtue of him giving them the status of family. Jack explained that Ricky is in a foster placement on the same estate that he lives on, they attend different schools but they spend most evenings together and meet up every weekend. Jack recently gave up playing for the local rugby team because he said it meant he could not spend enough time with his friend Ricky. The phrase he used to describe their relationship, *'two peas in a pod'*, encapsulates the level of homogeneity that he feels he shares with Ricky. Homogeneity is the key to bonding social capital, which Putnam (2001) refers to as sociological glue, it's what holds networks of social relationships together. Close family relationships are often cited as being a source of bonding social capital. Given the current physical absence of family in Jack's life and his disrupted network, typified by numerous placement moves and abrupt unplanned school moves, the relationships with those he feels closest to, his peers 'in care', are as close as family and are the source of his bonding social capital.

The incident where Jack was insulted and excluded for being 'in care' served to exclude him from school and the relationships he had there, which in turn could serve as a threat to his access to social capital. Therefore, by building friendships within the out group this has enabled him to build bonding social capital amongst a network of people who are highly unlikely to exclude him on the basis of his stigma, as they share it.

I was scheduled to meet Jack at 4pm at his foster placement, but as mentioned previously in chapter 5, he did not make the appointment. Whilst waiting for Jack to arrive I had a conversation with his foster carer. At the

time Jack was not answering his mobile or responding to any texts, I asked the foster carer where he thought Jack may be, and he said Jack would probably be round the corner at Ricky's house. The carer then expressed that he had some concerns about his relationship with Ricky as was a bit older than Jack and also in care. The carer was also quite open that he did not get along with Ricky's foster carer. When I met up with Ricky for the first time a week later he was acutely aware of his carers feelings about Ricky and his foster carer. Jack apologised for not meeting me last week and he said *'Sorry my phone was dead, I was only round Ricky's; my carer knew that's where I was, he could have called round there...but he wouldn't because he don't like Linda (Ricky's foster carer)'*. This highlights how Jack was maintaining his friendship with his *'best bud'* Ricky in a scenario with complexity and challenges. I sensed from the care that she was concerned about Jack falling in with the wrong crowd. However, if one listens to Jack's account of his experiences of care, the disruption to his relationships and the impact that his stigmatized status has had on his social capital, his relationship with Ricky and his *'in care'* friends presents as a vital resource for him. Jack's *'in care'* friends may be seen as a risk by the adults around him, for example, his foster carer, however, in these circumstances it is important to acknowledge that developing bonds with people who not only understand but share those experiences, is an adaptive response (Crocker & Major 1989). Furthermore, given this context of disruption and stigma, one should recognise that the bonds Jack has with his in care friends are a valuable resource for him and a source of social capital.

However, this is a complex picture and the carers concerns about Jack falling into the wrong crowd are certainly not without foundation. Young people in foster care are over represented in the criminal justice system (Stein 2012). Jack explained the *'trouble'* he had been in in the past, and the involvement he had with the police and the criminal justice system, this

ranged from stealing money from his carers and in the following example shoplifting from the local store:

Jack: Yeah, but I got in trouble when I was in that area as well, because I thought it was so boring, and then I thought, there's a shop down there so I'll rob it. So I went in there, because I'm a pretty good robber because I've been banned from One Stop.

Justin: I remember you saying. You were only young weren't you when you were caught in One Stop stealing stuff, yeah.

Jack: Yeah. I was twelve and I robbed a bottle of cider and a Chicken and Mushroom slice

Justin: Yeah.

Jack: But they only caught me nicking the Chicken slice.

Justin: They never caught you with the bottle of cider?

Jack: No... and then they banned me. But man the Chicken slice, I only nicked that because I was hungry. But I nicked the bottle of cider because my mate wanted it and he didn't have no money and he wasn't old enough.

In this instance the motivation for Jack to risk offending and to face the possible consequences of getting caught, was for friendship. Jack was not shoplifting for himself, the chicken slice was incidental for his hunger, the cider was the important item and this was for Jack to please his friend. Jack then went on to describe the neighbourhood where he lives and the influence that gangs have on his estate.

Justin: What's it like around here though, I don't know this area, what's it like?

Jack: Before I came here it was pretty rough.

Justin: Right, really?

Jack: Yeah. ...

Justin: What sort of stuff made it rough then, what was rough about it?

Jack: The kids, they just started copying what they're seeing on TV, people and gangs. There is one famous gang around here, it's the JP boys. And they're the roughest gang apparently going. But I'm not scared of them.

Justin: What do you think about people getting involved with them?

Jack: Well I can't get involved with them see I'm 13, they're older than me everyone's like 17 and 18. But if there was a fight and I had to fight with them I would.

The potential acceptance and belonging that a gang could afford Jack in this context could be seen as an understandable and adaptive response to his circumstances. Jack is a young person adapting to considerable social network disruption and stigmatization, therefore, the sense of belonging a gang could provide potentially makes him vulnerable to entering into gang culture. Putnam (2001) explains gang membership as the dark side of social capital; whereby some groups use the bonds of social networks for malevolent ends. Putnam gives the example of the Mafia or the Ku-Klux-Klan and describes how membership of these groups, despite their anti-social nature offers members a strong source of bonding social capital. Given these concerns about Jack's potential to become involved in criminality, the self-protective factors that he benefits from by being with other young people in care are tempered by the vulnerability that he and his peers face in becoming involved in offending behaviour and further excluded socially.

In contrast to the reticence that Jack's carer had in encouraging his relationships with others 'in care', there was also evidence in the data of foster carers promoting interactions between young people in care. This often occurred in informal ways, with carers meeting up with their friends who also fostered, for days out and even holidays with the young people placed in their care. For example, Nicola explained that she initially met other young people in care through her carer's social networks:

Justin: What about when you first sort of came into care? Can you remember telling people for the first time?

Nicola: I was a bit scared to start with, but Jade was sort of the first person I met in care. I just came out and said it to her, because my carer I wouldn't really talk to her.

Justin: Was your placed near Jade at the time?

Nicola: No, I met her as my old carer was best friends with her old carer. They used to do a lot of stuff together so we used to see each other a lot.

Justin: So was it good to see another person in foster care to tell them about your situation first?

Nicola: Yeah, and now the carer she's with is my old carer.

Samuel was another young person who participated in the research; he was thirteen years old at the time of the interview and had been in foster care for the past two years. Samuel had an older sister Beth who was sixteen years old and placed with him, this was their third foster placement and they had been living there for ten months. Samuel described how, like Nicola, he met with other young people in care through his foster carer's social network.

Samuel: I would say Lee is like my best mate

Justin: Tell me about Lee

Samuel: He goes to Newtown school but I see him at the weekends and some evenings. Going on the PGL trip together.

Justin: Have you known him long? Where did you meet him?

Samuel: I known him ages, like since I moved in here, nearly a year. He is in care like me, and his foster carer knows mine so at first when they used to meet up, we meet up. Now I meet him town, or we just go each other's houses.

Justin: Sounds like you get on?

Samuel: Yeah we have bare laughs and we both know what care is like

Justin: What is good about that, sharing the experience of care?

Samuel: Like he knows what its like to miss your Mum and that,

Justin: So do you chat about that stuff then

Samuel: Other than my sister he is the only one I talk to about that sort of stuff

Justin: Do you talk to your care or your social worker about it?

Samuel: My carer sometimes, not by social worker I never see them and when I want to talk to them I can never get them.

The opportunities to meet others 'in care' were also organised in more formal ways. For example, within the local authority, where the research took place, the youth service facilitated a consultation group for young people in care, which is a practice initiative, where peer support is facilitated and supported in a pro-social way. Three of the participants, Jade, Nicola

and Anna attended the group, which was coordinated by a youth worker. The purpose of the group is twofold; firstly, it acts as a consultation group that enables the local authority to gather the views of the young people placed in care; secondly, it provides a forum for young people in care to meet others. The findings show how this is enabling them to develop relationships of peer support where acts of reciprocity are occurring that provide emotional support (*research objective 4*).

Justin: So tell me about the group, what's that all about... what would do you do there?

Nicola: We have like 15 minutes and sort of like chill out time, which is like where we can make stuff, play games or just talk to each other and catch up. And then we do activities that like Heather organises for us. And then we have like another 10 minutes of fun time.

Justin: So have you got any friends from there, anyone from that group you would say is a good friend of yours?

Nicola: Jade

Justin: do you meet up a bit outside of the group as well at times.

Nicola: Yeah

Justin: So where was this photo taken?

Nicola: That was in the community centre

Justin: So that's where the Group meets?

Nicola: Yeah

Justin: So what did you do when you were there last night?

Nicola: Well I actually had to take the lesson. It was quite hard. We played a communication game. It was kind of like sleeping lions and what you have to

do is there's a person in the middle blindfolded but there were like set of keys next to them. Now if they heard you coming they have to like point at you and guess where you are, and they have three guesses, and if they didn't do it then we have to freeze all. The game is over. And then we did like this profile thing... where like if someone new comes to the group, they know stuff about you so we put it in a folder for them if they come.

So in the group session the night before Nicola was leading the 'lesson' and it clearly had a positive impact. Her detailed recollection of how she led the group demonstrates how this was an achievement that she was pleased with. Nicola's account also illustrates how the group leader is attempting to facilitate a welcoming environment that encourages other new members to attend by developing member profiles. In social capital terms this is building the values of reciprocity amongst the members, it enables them to think about information they would like to share with new members and encourages them to develop empathy for new people who perhaps maybe apprehensive about coming into the group. This group represents a practice approach that encourages peer support amongst young people 'in care', in a way that lessens the concerns that adults may have about young people developing in some way negative relationships. This is an example of the young people developing their networks and subsequently their access to social capital in a constructive way that is encouraged and supported by the adults involved in their care.

On a day to day basis the young people are engaged in complex practices in order to fit in with their peers and to manage their 'in care' identities, one could understand how spending time with those who are undertaking these same complex tasks could be valued by the young people. Because for them being with others in their stigmatized group does not require the stringent management of identity, as being 'in care' is shared and

within this group its normal. The excerpt from the transcript below highlights how these interactions are mutually supportive and as such they can be understood as being acts of reciprocity (*research objective 4*).

Justin: So what's that like when you meet other young people in foster care?

Nicola: It's quite fun. It's quite good knowing like they're in care so you're not the only person. I don't want to sound like nosey but knowing sort of what happened to them too. If they don't want to tell me, they don't have to tell me. But it's quite good knowing that like maybe they had the same situation as me.

Justin: So have they told you stuff like... have you heard other people's stories?

Nicola: Jade told me her situation. I haven't really asked anyone else. It's only because me and Jade are good friends.

Justin: Is her situation similar to yours would you say?

Nicola: No, it's completely different but now we are both in care

Justin: Have you told her about the reasons you come into care?

Nicola: I tell her everything, we are like sisters.

The local authority also organises yearly adventure holidays for young people in care, and another participant Becky explained what this experience was like. Firstly, in order to place Becky's experiences in context, like the proceeding participants a brief overview of her care history is included. Becky is fourteen years old and is placed with her twelve year old brother, Gary, who also participated in the study. Becky and Gary are in their third foster placement and they have recently been told that this

placement now has long term approval and it is intended that they will remain in this placement for the duration of their time 'in care'. The following excerpt is from the transcript of the first interview with Becky and the discussion arose after she placed her mother on the eco map she was completing. It highlights the events that led to her coming into care:

Justin: *So what's your Mum like, tell me about her?*

Becky: *She can be quite aggressive and moody and annoying and, but she is really nice sometimes.*

Justin: *Ok. So in what ways can she be sort of aggressive?*

Becky: *When she's wound up she can hit, just storm or throw stuff, stuff like that.*

Justin: *So it sounds like she can be a bit angry and stuff at times. But you still put her down as one of the closest people to you.*

Becky: *Because you only get one Mum and people always think that their Mum is just the worst person in the world, but when you're away from them for a long time you realise how much you really care for them.*

Justin: *Right, yeah that makes sense.*

Becky: *So even if your Mum's got problems or whatever and gets a bit aggressive if you're away from them then you realise how much they mean to you, that sort of thing.*

Justin: *Can I ask the reasons why you have come into foster care if you don't mind me asking?*

Becky: *I don't really know too much about it myself but I just know that because Mum isn't able to give us the right needs and isn't able to care for us.*

Justin: *So how did it sort of happen, do you remember how it happened when you came into care?*

Becky: *I went to school and told the teacher, that is really close to me, some stuff that happened at home, and she told Mr. Birch, and he told social services and social services came in with this special police officer guy.*

Justin: *Yeah, and they came and listened to what was happening at home. Can I ask what it was? What happened at home?*

Becky: *Mum just hits us all the time, always shouting, I got blamed for stuff that didn't happen and I got punished. And then a couple of times in that last month I told them how she would grab me by the neck and throw me to the floor, and it wasn't really nice.*

During our second interview, the photo elicitation part of the project, Becky showed the following photograph to represent the activity holiday she went away on during her summer holiday.



The PGL holiday was organised by the local authority and for Becky and Gary it was the first time they were able to spend time with other young people in foster care, the following excerpt highlights the opportunity this provided Becky to meet with others who in her words were 'just like me':

Justin: *Was it good to meet other kids in care?*

Becky: *Yeah.*

Justin: *So talking to them about being in care, was it different, like when you talk to your friends about it?*

Becky: *Yeah, because they understand more, because they're in care as well.*

Justin: *Right.*

Becky: *So they like know about the experience as well.*

Justin: *Right. What was their sort of experience like, what were they telling you about their experience of it?*

Becky: *That they've been in for about five years.*

Justin: *Right.*

Becky: *And they've been in quite a few places.*

Justin: *Have they?*

Becky: *Yeah. Seven different carers, But one's quite naughty.*

Justin: *Right.*

Becky: *And then, it's just that their Mum was violent*

Justin: *Right. So did they have similar story to you?*

Becky: *Yeah.*

Justin: Yeah, were they happy where they were at the minute?

Becky: Yeah. They liked their carers now, just like me really.

It was also apparent that the young people's stigmatized status also had the potential to afford beneficial self-protective factors in their interactions with their peers who were not 'in care'. For example, the act of disclosing their care status by telling friends that they live in foster care, led to a potential strengthening of friendships. A number of the young people who had disclosed their status to a friend described how they now referred to the relationship with that friend using the closest possible terms. Across the data the participants often expressed this closeness by referring to their friends as a family member; as previously discussed Jack described how his close friends '*are like cousins*' and Jade described one of her close friends as being '*like a sister*'. Returning to Nicola she explained how the first person she told, about her care status, amongst her peers at school was Jenny, and how reaction to the disclosure demonstrated her ability to '*stick by*' Nicola. This is an indicator of acts of reciprocity in their relationship (*research objective 4*); it is also a source of close emotional support that helps her get by so serves as a source of bonding social capital (*research objective 2*):

Justin: But you chose to tell Jenny about it?

Nicola: Yeah, because we are like sisters, we practically tell each other everything like from 'I couldn't find my socks this this morning.' to like if she was getting married in the future or things like that. We tell each other everything.

Justin: So she is your closest friend you'd say?

Nicola: Yeah, since then Jenny has always stuck by me.

Conclusion

This chapter has demonstrated that young people in foster care understand their status of being 'in-care' brings with it the challenges of a stigma. These challenges can result in exclusion from the in-group and the resultant networked practices, which could impact on their access to social capital. However, despite the impact of stigma the young people in this study showed the ways they were able to negate the challenges by attempting to manage their spoiled identity. This was often achieved by establishing peer relationships with others that were in foster care in effect establishing their own 'in-groups'. Although concern appeared to exist amongst the adults that there were risks inherent in the young people's relationships with their fostered peers, it was apparent that for the young people the potential benefits outweighed the adult concerns of risk.

The peer relationships amongst young people in foster care serve as a resource, which helps them to manage their spoiled identity and the challenges of stigma and as such they are an important form of bonding social capital. These findings address *Research objective 4*, as they provide evidence of how young people in foster care are engaging in practices of reciprocity in their network. They do this through the development of mutually supportive relationships, which is evidence of reciprocity. Furthermore, *research objective 5*, asks do young people in foster care express a sense of belonging, and these findings show that some of the participants find this belonging with their 'in-care' peers. This is evident when you consider the strength of feeling that was expressed by Jack, when he discussed his friendships with his 'in-care' peers and described them in terms of family. These findings in this chapter have implications for policy and practice and this will be discussed in the concluding section of the thesis with suggestions of how to improve practice.

Chapter 7 Building the foundations: developing access to social capital

Introduction

This chapter presents data that further highlight the potential impact that disrupted social networks can have on the young people's engagement in networked practices, which enable them to access social capital. Findings are presented in two sections that illustrate differing ways in which disruption influences young people's ability to maintain and develop their access to social capital. The first section highlights the ways in which network disruption can adversely affects young people's opportunities to participate in leisure activities. However, despite the challenges the data also shows how they endeavour to make continuous attempts to participate in a range of activities, which could enable them to build access to social capital. Therefore, these findings address *research objective 3* as they illustrate the ways that young people adapt and attempt to participate in socially networked activities.

The second section of the chapter presents further findings that highlight how some of the young people strive to minimise the effect of lost connections in their disrupted social networks. The findings show how they often achieve this by engaging in practices that memorialise their past relationships, which continue their bonds with the people who are often the most important to them. These practices of memorialisation provide access to a valued source of bonding social capital. Therefore, these findings further address *research objective 2* as they provide evidence that suggests that young people in foster care are actively engaging in practices that enable them to access bonding social capital.

These two sections are distinct, yet they are also related by the notion that against adversity, and the threat of network disruption, the young people in this study, persevere and demonstrate a commitment to engage in

practices that enable them to build the foundations of their access to social capital.

Perseverance: the ongoing attempts to build social capital

As chapter 3 highlighted, social participation, including participation in cultural and leisure pursuits, has been widely used as an indicator of social capital (Bourdieu 1986; Putnam 2001; Schaefer-Mcdaniel 2004). Lindstrom et al (2001) describe social participation as the taking part in both formal and informal groups within society, including participation in sporting and other leisure pursuits. Leisure activities provide people with opportunities to build and diversify their social networks, which is potentially a useful way to develop access to social capital (Lennartsson & Silverstein 2001; Putnam 2001). Leisure activities have previously been utilised as a proxy a way of measuring social capital (Putnam 2001; Schaefer-Mcdaniel 2004; Weller 2006). For example, Putnam's central argument for declining social capital within communities in America centred on people's decreasing involvement in organised ten pin bowling leagues. Bourdieu (1986) referred to participation in leisure activities when he used the example of the golf club to highlight how such a networked activity has the potential to facilitate access to capital and ease its fungibility. Furthermore, Weller (2006) examined young people's involvement in leisure activities in the Isle of Wight and provided a nuanced account of the ways young people's social networks were built around activities such as skateboarding and BMXing. It is important to note that the leisure activities themselves are not social capital, but the socially networked practices and the relationships that are formed through participation in the activity could provide access to important sources of social capital. This study considers the term leisure activity in a broad sense and attempts to follow the data, in order to examine the range of networked activities that the young people are engaged in. This has been an important point as data highlights a diverse range of activities

with varying degrees of social interaction, which the young people themselves valued, and as such could, on their own terms, provide them with access to social capital. This understanding led to the development of *research objective 4* that seeks to explore in what young people in foster care are engaging in socially networked activities.

Whilst completing the eco-map with Luke during the first interview, it was apparent that he had noticeably fewer relationships in his network and was far less socially engaged than the other participants. As a result one could assume that Luke presented as having less access to social capital. However, drawing inferences about the number of connections in a social network and the amount of social capital is problematic. This is evident in Luke's account because despite having limited social networks the findings presented below, show that his relatively small core group of friends from school are important to him and represent the foundations of his social capital, a resource which he has hopes to develop in the future.

At the time of the interviews Luke was about to turn 15 years old and he was in a long term foster placement with his older brother. Prior to the interviews both his foster carer and social worker expressed concerns about Luke's '*isolation*'. In fact they were surprised that he had agreed to take part in the research, as they described how they found it difficult to motivate him. The foster carer explained that they were hoping to address Luke's '*isolation*', in order to achieve this they were in the process of introducing Luke to a mentor, whom they hoped, could help Luke develop an interest in fishing. During the eco-map activity Luke placed his older brother on first; he then went on with some hesitation to place his mother and father on the map. Initially, Luke was not very talkative during the interviews and he responded to the questions with very short answers, and the following exchange about his parents was indicative of that:

Justin: Tell me about you Mum, what is she like?

Luke: she's a drunk

Justin: Ok, and your Dad, what is your Dad like?

Luke: he's a bigger drunk.

Luke went on to describe how he had seen his mother in the town on the day of the interview and how he avoided her because '*she was drinking in the high street with a load of drunks.*' It seemed that Luke is acutely aware of the social stigma that relates to his parents alcohol use, and by identifying them as '*drunks*' he was protecting himself. He did this by using the label of others in an attempt to pass and fit in with the '*in-group*'. Therefore, Luke appeared to take this approach as a form of defense, in order to manage his own identity by distancing himself from potentially adopting a courtesy stigma. Goffman (1968) refers to the notion of courtesy stigma, whereby a person can be attributed a stigma through their connection to someone who holds a stigmatized status. Luke is negotiating the management of his own spoiled identity of being '*in care*', and the impact of his parent's spoiled identity of being '*drunks*'.

These multiple challenges of coping with stigma, offer a potential explanation as to why Luke presented as being cautious in the small number of friendships he works to keep. Whilst completing the eco-map with Luke it became apparent that his social network presented as being smaller than the other participants, it consisted of seven people: his mother and father, his brother and the people who he described as the most important to him, his three friends from school.

Luke was also a more reserved young person and presented as being more limited in his ability to verbally describe in detail his interactions within his social network. This is where the photo elicitation part of the

project was of real benefit, for example, the following two photographs he took communicate and reinforce the importance that playing computer games online held for him. With the brief to take photographs of the most important things, places and activities, two out of the six photographs that Luke took showed his love for the Ps3.





Amongst Luke's wider peer group of fourteen year olds in the UK, game console ownership is fairly common, with this specific model the Ps3 selling over five million units in the UK alone (Reynolds 2012). Other popular consoles such as the Wii and the X-box have also sold millions of units. However, for Luke the Ps3 was not a common place item or something he took for granted and these photographs illustrate that it represented something of great importance for him. The activity of playing the game was clearly something he enjoyed, but it also presented as being important because he played online with his three close friends from school. As such the Ps3 afforded him access to a socially networked activity, one of the few that he was regularly engaged in outside of school. Yet, the console was something he had limited access to, it belonged to his older brother and he only had permission to play on it for one hour a day.

Luke explained on occasion how he played some games on the Ps3 with a headset microphone, so he could talk to his friends. Luke also described how after they played in the evening they usually talked about the game the next day at school. These descriptions of how Luke is interacting on his Ps3 highlight that he is engaging in a networked activity. Luke's interest in playing computer games with his friends online turned out to be one of the motivating factors that led him to participate in the research, as he was aware the incentive voucher he would receive for participating would go some way in enabling him to buy a new game. Luke's account of playing computer games challenges concerns from the adults involved in his care who viewed the computer games as isolating and that served to reinforce his lack of social interaction with his peers. Playing video games online presented as being valued less than other forms of activity, by the adults in his life. For example, his foster carer and his social worker both seemed frustrated when they spoke of how the PlayStation was the only thing he was interested in. Although the adults recognised it as an activity that Luke enjoyed, there seemed little recognition of how for Luke that the activity was a social one, which involved playing and communicating with friends from school.

As previously discussed, the purpose of examining the leisure activities the young people take part in is not intended to hierarchize one activity over another, but to ascertain the value that the participants themselves placed on these networked activities and whether they provide access to forms of social capital. Despite the element of social networking involved in playing games online with his friends, Luke seems to have awareness that this is not enough and the following findings highlight that he actually shares the adult's wishes for him to do more. In the following section of the transcript Luke is talking through his photograph of his BMX. Luke goes on to clearly express aspirations to engage in more leisure

activities, and within his account it is apparent that he hopes for increased social interactions with his peers, which could enable him to increase his access to social capital.



***Luke:** It's a bit knackered at the moment, but when I get it fixed in the summer I will be going down the skatepark on it.*

***Justin:** Right, do you go down the skatepark on your scooter*

***Luke:** I would go down on my scooter but they are only allowed on the metal ramp cause they have been banned from the concrete park...I want a new BMX really, like a GT or a United bike, then I would be down the skatepark a lot.*

***Justin:** Do your friends from school go down there?*

***Luke:** Yeah Lee, he is down there all the time, he has a well nice bike, a GT.*

Above, Luke expresses his view that if his bike was fixed up, or if he had a new BMX, he would go 'down the skatepark a lot' with his friend Lee

who he plays the Ps3 with online. This suggests that Luke feels the relationships that he is building at school and whilst playing games online had some scope to develop further over the summer. It seems that Luke perceives the relationships that he is cultivating, all be it with limited time online, as the start of something important. Therefore, these interactions could be seen as valuable as they are the foundations of Luke's access to social capital, a starting point, and as such something that he could build on in the future. This offers a potential explanation as to why that hour a day on the Ps3 is so important to him. These findings also run contrary to adult concerns that Luke possessed a total lack of motivation to participate socially in activities, it is apparent that by listening to Luke that a spark of motivation to develop his friendships and to engage in more leisure activities does exist.

From this spark one could argue that there is potential for Luke to realise his hopes of engaging in more social activities and to meet up with his friends outside school. In this instance his BMX bicycle is a tool that could facilitate this; initially he could go to the skate park with his friend Lee, which may then lead to making social connections with other young people at the park. Of course, Luke may not have the social skills or inclination to realise his hopes, indeed the bike may represent a past failed attempt by his previous carers to support and encourage him, as they bought him the bike in the first place. However, with his bike now sat in the garden with its rusty chain hanging off, both tyres punctured and with weeds growing around it, his ability to try again and to join in with his friends is impaired and as such so is the ability for him to potentially build relationships and subsequently increase his access to social capital.

Findings suggest that Luke has an understanding that interacting more with his peers could be beneficial for him and this interest in the skatepark is an indication that he has a desire to join in on more leisure activities. He also demonstrated an awareness of how he could achieve this,

for example, what he felt he would need to do was to get a working bike, which would enable him to fit in and belong with his peers at the skatepark. Luke's hopes to socialise at the skate park existed amidst a context where adults involved in his care were concerned about his social isolation and yet these aspirations appeared to go unnoticed. Furthermore, this perceived social isolation is misunderstood by the carer and social worker, because Luke's social network may well be small, but the virtue of applying a social capital lens shows that a small network does not necessarily mean small social capital. The benefits of social relationships, the social capital resources they provide, can only really be understood when one considers the quality and not the quantity.

Bourdieu's (1984) conceptualisation of social capital has been criticised for neglecting to acknowledge children's agency (Morrow, 2001), and failing to recognise their ability to engage in practices of social capital. However, Bourdieu's work does have value as it highlights the pivotal role that adults, specifically parents, play in the transmission of capital. Berridge (2007, p.7) highlights the role middle class parents play in their children's educational success by strategizing and utilising '*their advantageous social networks*' for their children's benefit. He goes on to argue that in public care the state needs to undertake the same strategies if it wants looked after children to achieve social mobility. In Luke's case it could be argued that his foster carer and social worker were, at the time, less than successful in strategizing and transmitting social capital. Whether Luke has the skills to transform the connections he was cultivating whilst playing on the PS3 with his friends online, into what could be viewed as his fairly modest hopes of going to the skate park into action is of course not certain. However, what was apparent at the time of the interviews was the adults involved in his care were not attempting to support him with this in order for him to give it a try. By simply listening to Luke talk about the photograph that he took of

the bike, it became clear that the bike provide an opportunity for him to engage in an activity, which could enable him to develop the social connections that he had been building and potentially increase his access to social capital. Therefore, this seemed to be a potential opportunity that was missed by his carers, and as the photograph illustrates it is an opportunity rusting away in the weeds.

By way of contrast to Luke's experiences and the more limited and measured ways he interacted during his leisure time, Becky, who was introduced in the previous chapter, with the support of her carers was starting to engage in a much wider range of leisure activities. Becky was also taking an active role in developing her own social skills, and demonstrated how she exercised agency to build the foundations of her own access to social capital. However, to place this in context Becky also provided an example of how this had not always been the case and how in her previous placement her carers actually impaired her ability to participate in leisure activities. In the following excerpt from the transcript Becky describes a situation where the adults involved in her care impacted negatively on her ability to participate in a house evening at her school:

Justin: so when you do like a house evening, who goes long? Do your carers go along to see it?

Becky: Well last year it was just my foster Mum came to one, but at the other one no one came, because I had a falling out with my foster carers.

Justin: Right. Why, didn't you want them to come along?

Becky: No I did, it's just they were quite angry with me, they didn't talk to me for a couple of days, and they didn't want to come.

Justin: Right. What did you fall out over?

Becky: Me getting in a strop, because I couldn't go to house evening (extra-curricular activity at school) unless I got a lift. And they didn't want me to go in the end because I got stroppy when no one would give me a lift. But then I got a lift in the end off of my social worker, and then they just didn't talk to me for a couple of days.

Justin: Oh, What was that like for you? It sounds awkward?

Becky: Well I am used to it my Mum never used to come to them anyway.

Justin: What's that like with your other friends, because I guess your other friends have got someone coming to it.

Becky: I just pretend someone's there.

Justin: You just tell your friends that there is someone there sort of thing.

Becky: So they don't fuss about it.

Justin: Well that makes sense Becky I can understand why you do that.

Yeah. If you have a house evening now, who would come along to it do you think?

Becky: I think Mum, and probably my new carers. The other thing my old carers they thought Mum was going last year and they didn't want to see her because they don't like Mum. Because the last two foster placements my Mum and the foster carers didn't get along

Justin: So your Mum and your foster carers didn't get on, and they thought your Mum was going so they didn't go, and then your Mum didn't go and you were left with no one there sort of thing.

Becky: Yea... when you fall out with a mate they say oh this is stupid, just make up. And then when they fall out with people they just don't talk to them and act childish as well!

The findings presented so far in this section of the chapter have illustrated how adults can potentially affect young people's ability to access social capital by not effectively supporting their involvement in leisure activities. The excerpt above highlights how an adult's behaviour can also hinder a young person's own attempts to get involved in activities. The disagreements amongst the adults involved in Becky's care had the potential to impact negatively on her relationships within her social network, and consequently her ability to build access to social capital. However, despite these potential challenges Becky demonstrated that she has the ability to negotiate the disagreements and differences amongst the adults in her life, by explaining how she was able to continue to participate in the house evening with support from her social worker. Becky also demonstrated how she was able to manage threats to her relationships, when she told her friends that family were present at the performance, which served to obscure her status of being in-care and allowed her to manage her 'spoiled identity'.

Returning to Anna, who was introduced in chapter 6, her experiences highlight just how disruptive a placement in foster care away from your local area can be on your existing social networks, and how this can impact negatively on one's ability to build access to social capital. Anna explained that when she was placed at a physical distance, away from the people in her social network, and she reported that it impacted so negatively on her ability to socialise with her peers that to her it meant she '*did not have a social life for a year*':

Justin: *Who would you say that is like the closest person to you?*

Anna: *Molly.*

Justin: *Molly. Tell me about Molly, what's she like?*

Anna: *Fiery, always there for you, really understanding, everything you want in a friend really.*

Justin: Right. And how long have you known Molly?

Anna: Since I was about four/five.

Justin: Right, right. So how did you first know her?

Anna: Well yeah, I lived like at number 62, she lived down the end of the road. And we just met like playing in the park and stuff. And then my sister and her sister obviously are like best friends as well, so.

Justin: Right. So you've known her like since you were four, so you've known her for nearly 10 years?

Anna: Yeah and then we were like best friends in ... well we've always like been best friends since about year three.

Justin: Yeah, so tomorrow, say you were spending the day with Molly, what sort of stuff would you do together?

Anna: Probably just go to town or the retail park or sit in her house on the Wii and trampoline, I love her trampoline.

Justin: Whereabouts does she live now, is she nearby?

Anna: Not far now, my carers drop me there.

Justin: I remember you saying that at your old placement you wanted to come back to this area, didn't you, because your school's here and all your mates are here, yeah, yeah. Because you were a long way away weren't you? What was that like when you were over there then?

Anna: Horrible.

Justin: It was about 20 miles away wasn't it?

Anna: Yeah, and I didn't ever get to see any of my friends, or go to youth club.

Justin: And did you know anyone over there?

Anna: No.

Justin: Right. So can I ask like how long you've been in foster care?

Anna: About a year.

Justin: Right. And you went straight over there did you when you came into care? And for about a year you were travelling backwards and forwards 20 miles for school. Did you have any friends over there?

Anna: No. None.

Justin: So what did you do with yourself when you were over there then?

Anna: I just stayed in. Basically I didn't have a social life for a year.

Justin: Did you ever try and spend time with your friends, did your carers ever bring you over to this area?

Anna: No. I had one friend from here come over in the whole year, Molly, and that was it.

Justin: How often did she come over?

Anna: No, it was just once.

Justin: Right. Did she sleep over as well?

Anna: No, she was there for an hour she had to leave at like eleven in the morning.

Justin: Right. Why was that?

Anna: Because we had to go out... I hated it there.

The excerpt above illustrates the negative impact that having a limited sense of belonging to both the area and to the people with whom she was

placed, had on Anna's social networks and her ability to build her access to social capital. This potentially negative impact that moving into care has on social networks is not an uncommon experience for fostered young people, Morgan (2009) reported that, out of 370 young people they surveyed in care, 35% had lost contact with all the friends that they had made before coming into care. If these friendships once offered emotional support they can be understood as a source of bonding social capital, and these lost contacts could be viewed as a potential lost resource.

In her previous placement, out of her local area, Anna put in the work to preserve her friendships by utilising online social media. Anna described that, in this previous placement, outside of school the only way she maintained her relationships with her friends was through the use of Facebook. These attempts to preserve her friendships online have proved a good investment of her time and served a purpose, as she is now placed back in the same area as her old friends, where she feels she belongs. This return to a place where she feels a sense of belonging, has enabled her to go back to interacting with her friends in a range of activities from going to the retail park, playing on the Wii games console and jumping on the trampoline. For Anna these activities seemed to represent opportunities to develop her social skills and move from merely preserving her social capital to consolidating and diversifying her access to social capital. It seems that this was also the start of Anna being able to utilise her friendships as bonding social capital, which helps people get by in life (Putnam 2001). For Anna it was apparent her friends were now helping her to '*get by*' in foster care.

Becky and Gary recently moved to a long term placement, in an area near to their school and where the majority of their friends lived. This placement appeared to promote a sense of belonging, which seems to have had a positive effect on their ability to participate socially. Importantly for Becky and Gary this meant that like Anna they were able to begin to

participate in their social networks on their own terms and exercise agency and manage their relationships. The following example begins to illustrate this point, it stems from when I asked Gary to compare his current placement with his previous placement, he replied:-

***Gary:** Well it's better because with Jane and Eddie and Marion and Steve they lived in the country. And then now with Liz and Shaun, we do a lot of stuff, cause like on Friday when we are going up north for a week, and then when we come back we're doing a PGL week, and then a week later we get to see our Mum and Dennis, and then we get to see our granddad ... And then we get the rest of the holiday here and then it's back to school and then in the October half term we might be going to Greece. And what's really good about here is that all of our friends live round here, because we go to Greenton school...So now that we're here I'm usually like, I can just go outside see if my friends are out, or talk to them on the computer and arrange to meet up with them.*

Gary had experience of being supported effectively by his carers to engage in leisure activities and this was something he appreciated. The value Gary placed on this support is evident when one considers that unlike Luke who did not put his foster carer on his eco-map, Gary was keen to add all of his previous carers to his eco-map.

***Justin:** Who else would you put on there that's important people to you?*

***Gary:** Well on the other side because that's like proper family. Then like all the carers who have had us. Like Marion and Shaun. They were quite caring...every time we got home from school they would always give us something, like when it was our birthday they tried to take the thought off that we weren't with our Mum, and try to cheer us up.*

***Justin:** Yeah. So they were quite caring in terms of when you got home from school they would have dinner, food ready for you?*

Gary: *Yeah, and they would take us to a lot of activities. We went to adventure golf and I went on a science week with the school. We also went to Wales and that was like two weeks after we were put there, and we also did quite a lot of other stuff with them.*

Justin: *So they sort of helped you do a lot of activities and days out and things like that. Is that important with foster carers, would you say? Say if I was going around looking for new foster carers to look after children, would you say that is a good thing to find, foster carers who do lots of stuff?*

Gary: *Yeah, because it wouldn't be like very helpful if foster carers didn't do much, and all you did was sat there. You'd just be thinking about why you're not living at home and stuff. But when you are busy with people, having fun, doing lots of stuff it just takes your mind off things.*

This excerpt highlights that Gary's positive experiences with his carers has meant that he regarded them as an important part of his social network. As a result, each set of carers past and present were perceived by him in varying degrees to have been, or continue to be, a supportive resource and as such they represent a source of bonding social capital.

Gary also described how his current carers did lots of 'stuff' like his previous carers but it was evident that living with them also offered something extra. It became evident that this was that they lived in the local area to Gary's school and close to friends he had known whilst at primary school when he lived at home with his parents. Gary described how he regularly had his friends over to his foster placement, and how he also visited his friends' houses. Gary also made a specific point of saying that what is '*really good*' about his placement is that his friends live nearby. One could argue that this important component of his placement, proximity to friends, could by many of his peers, outside of the care system, be something that they would take for granted. However, for Gary his previous experience

of disrupted social networks, and being placed in an area away from his friends, means it was far from being taken for granted, instead he recognised living near to his friends as being a '*really good*' thing. The following excerpt reinforces this point further when Gary describes the interactions he has with his best friend Josh and illustrates how his carer's encouragement to have his friends over to the home has enriched his access to social capital.

***Gary:** We get together and go on Josh's trampoline and stuff.*

***Justin:** Oh so you go to his house sometimes do you? Where does he live, nearby?*

***Gary:** Yeah, he lives about 5 minutes down the road.*

***Justin:** Right, so when you see your friends you don't spend time playing computers, you spend time trampolining and playing football and stuff like that. So how often do you go to your friend's house would you say?*

***Gary:** Every day. Usually after school.*

***Justin:** Ok so after school, you go round there. And does he ever come round here?*

***Gary:** When I come home at the weekends and have my lunch he usually comes around here and joins me and he comes round here when it's raining because he's got a broken arm so he can't get it wet. So whenever it's raining he comes around here.*

***Justin:** Right, okay. And what's it like, having your friends around?*

***Gary:** It's quite fun because Becky always annoys me, so it gives me someone else to annoy her with.*

Gary actively managed his relationships with his friends and they offered him support, in this instance he explained, with humour, that they were vital support to annoy his older sister! Across the two interviews Gary spoke

about his friends in detail, they presented as being important to him, and like Anna in the previous section, friends provided a valued source of bonding social capital, which helped him on a day to day basis to get by in foster care.

Gary also spoke about a love of football and how he played in informal settings with his friends in the school playground at lunchtime, or in the park outside of school time.

***Gary:** The three of us meet up and we go to lunar park and then other people come and join in.*

***Justin:** From your school or local people?*

***Gary:** From our school and Little Heath.*

***Justin:** Right. What's that like up there then?*

***Gary:** Well it's quite fun because we just play a massive football match and then after we just go on this skate park or something.*

***Justin:** And do you all sort of get along when you play football...*

***Gary:** Well yeah because we usually have a parent kind of doing the refereeing, they kind of make the red cards and yellow cards, and sometimes if they give you a card and you don't think you deserve it that starts an argument and then all of us get involved and then there is kind of no football match.*

***Justin:** So it's like an organised thing. And it's a parent that does the refereeing. Is it a club or something like that?*

***Gary:** No it's just a parent who comes down. It kind of changes all the time which parent does it... before they do it they have to agree not to favor their child, to avoid disagreements...*

Leisure activities have become increasingly commodified (Ridge 2012) so for some families, who are lacking in stocks of economic capital, supporting children's participation in formal clubs may be unaffordable. In the excerpt above, the park where Gary plays football borders a low income neighbourhood, for Gary's friends the cost of taking part in a football team may well have been prohibitive. In this instance parents negate these financial barriers by organising free leisure activities themselves, they attend the park and support the children and young people and act as referees in the games. This potentially indicates that despite a lack of economic capital amongst the people in this social network a stock of social capital exists with connected people acting in a reciprocal way for no monetary gain, in this instance for the benefit of the children in the neighbourhood who were interested in football. Gary benefits from this social capital and enjoys the activity that the adults in his network support. These organised yet informal activities of this type would have been missed if this study applied narrow indicators of club membership that have been utilised in other social capital studies (Putnam 2001).

Gary went on to explain that his current foster carers were looking in to get him into a local football team for the first time, which is something he is looking forward to. It seems that his long term placement has meant that organised/formal activities had become a possibility that did not seem to have existed in his previous short term placement, or when he was living with his Mother. It is important to acknowledge that although the informal activity of the football matches at the park are valued by Gary, the chance to play in an organised team could mean he may potentially benefit from diversifying his networks. For example, an organised formal team may provide him with the opportunity to meet people different from those with whom he usually associates. This opportunity could result in increased

heterogeneity in his network, and provide potential sources of bridging social capital that could serve to help him 'get ahead'.

These opportunities to commit to formal leisure activities have also arisen for Gary's sister Becky. After explaining her history in public care, Becky went on to highlight that the permanence in her long term placement was good as it allowed her to keep going to sea cadets:-

Becky: *Well when I was a baby I was in care because my Mum was young and she couldn't cope but then we went back. But I've been with 3 different carers since I've come back in, because the first one's retired and then the second ones were short term, so then I came here.*

Justin: *So you've had 3 different foster carers. What's that like having three different carers?*

Becky: *It's just when you have to say goodbye I always get upset saying goodbye to anyone.*

Justin: *So who were those carers, who were the first ones?*

Becky: *Jane and Eddie, and then Marion and Steve.*

Justin: *And now you're with Liz and Shaun. What's that like?*

Becky: *Good.*

Justin: *Compared to the other two lots of carers that you've been with, how would you say it compares?*

Becky: *I guess, well Jane and Eddie we did lots of activities with them, Marion and Steve not so much because it was like quite far away from things and here because its long term I've been able to join clubs as well, so I guess it gets better.*

Justin: *Okay. So do you know how long you're going to be here for?*

Becky: *Until I'm 18.*

Justin: *Right so is this like a long term placement now, so how does that make you feel?*

Becky: *Good that I don't have to move again so I can stay near my friends and keep going to sea cadets.*

In the excerpt above Becky introduced the subject of leisure activities and she highlighted that her current long term placement was good because it afforded her the opportunity to join clubs. The placement seems to have allowed her the possibility to commit to sea cadets long term, which is important to her as in the month that she has been attending Becky stated that she has '*made really good friends there*'. Becky's carers initially arranged for Becky to attend Sea-cadets for a trial session, to see if it was an activity she would enjoy. At the time of the interview Becky had been attending twice a week for the past four weeks. The following excerpt highlights how important an activity it had become for her and how the relationships she had made there had started to become an important source of social capital:-

Justin: *Okay. So are these school friends or sea cadets?*

Becky: *Sea-cadets.*

Justin: *Where do you do that, there's no sea around here!*

Becky: *At the Barracks and then we go to the river.*

Justin: *Oh right so you go onto the river. Yeah. How often do you go to that?*

Becky: *Sea-cadets? Twice a week.*

Justin: *Wow. How long have you been doing that for?*

Becky: *A month I think.*

Justin: So you've been going for a month and wow you're writing down – how many people are you writing down on this? One, two, three, four –There are over ten people there. So you've been going for a month but you've made sort of ten friends there already wow. What's it like going to sea cadets, tell me about it. I don't know anything about it, what do you do at sea cadets?

Becky: You have a uniform, it's like your number 4's that you wear all the time. Your number 1's are for special occasions which we don't have that often. But then you have, you do your colors in the morning, well first, where you go on and you look at the flag and salute. And then you go and do lessons and just learn about the sea-cadets. Then gradually you become from new entry to cadet, ordinary and then star. And then the more points you get the more ranks you go up.

Justin: You know a lot about it. Do you like it...What's good about it?

Becky: That everyone's actually really nice there. And it's just really fun.

Justin: Right. Oh that's cool. Do any of these people know that you're in foster care?

Becky: Yep, three of them...Sally, Jo and Ellen.

Justin: Right, so they are like your, close friends there and you chose to tell them that you're in foster care. Do they know much about it, what did they say about it?

Becky: They just are very supportive.

Justin: Okay, that's good. But you've not told everyone?

Becky: Just my close friends.

Justin: Right, so do you only see all these people at sea cadets?

Becky: No we went to town yesterday. And one of them came round here for dinner. Ellen.

Justin: Who arranged that, for Ellen to come around?

Becky: My carer suggested it and I asked her.

In this instance Becky's carers played an important role in promoting her participation. They not only supported her involvement at sea cadets on a formal level; they also encouraged her to develop the friendships she made there, outside of the formal sea cadet group setting. At the time of the interview Becky was fourteen years of age and prior to her current placement she had lived with four other carers and yet this is the first time she has attended a formal ongoing club. It is important to acknowledge that an individual's disposition may mean that attending formal activities may not be something they enjoy or value. However, this does not seem to be the case for Becky as she explained the reason why she liked her current long term placement was it meant she could continue at sea cadets, which suggests that attending clubs is something that Becky enjoys. Therefore, given that she values participating in an activity such as sea cadets it seems curious that it has taken until she is fourteen years of age, before she first attends a club of this kind. With the commodification of young people's leisure activities (Ridge 2002) attendance at a club may have been beyond her parent's economic capabilities prior to entering care. However, Becky has lived in three different foster placements over the past two years and the carers in these placements receive a weekly allowance to support the young people in their care, there is an expectation that with part of the allowance they promote young people's involvement in hobbies and leisure activities. Therefore, in the past two years finances should not have been a limiting factor in Becky's participation.

Of course, it may have been a question of timing; perhaps Becky's own interest or motivation to participate in clubs may have coincided with her move to long term placement. However, it may also have been the case that previous 'short term' carers did not see the benefit in encouraging

activities like sea cadets and were reluctant to do so. This reluctance may in fact have been thought through and justified decision making and waiting until Becky was in a permanent placement may have been the right decision for her. However, regardless of the decision making process what this has meant for Becky is that her social participation has been impaired. This is evident when you consider she is starting at sea cadets at the age of fourteen, which in comparison to her peers is late, as she stated most of her friends there have been going since they were ten years of age (the starting age at sea cadets).

Becky had made friends at sea cadets that she described as close, and she felt they are close enough friends to share her status of being 'in-care'. Becky explained that this is the first time she had disclosed her care status to anyone outside of her close friends at school. This suggests that she has developed her access to social capital to a point where she felt able to utilise it in order to gain some support from it. However, it is also apparent that she is at the start of a process of participation that her peers at sea cadets may have more experience of. For example, they have been attending sea cadets for four years longer than Becky, which means they are potentially more embedded in the sea cadet's social network. Furthermore, they may also have had or continue to have the opportunity to attend a range of other different activities or clubs. Therefore, they are potentially engaging in more refined practices because they are established in the sea cadet's network and they may also have access to wider social networks as they participate across a range of different clubs, which in turn would improve their access to social capital.

With the permanence of a long term placement, and the support from her carers, Becky is starting to make social connections and engage in practices that represent the early formation of social capital, she has laid the foundations and she is now starting to build her access to social capital.

Becky's carers are key to this development as they are clearly encouraging her to participate socially with their friends in both formal and informal settings thus enabling her opportunity to start to develop her relationships with her friends. In this instance the carers seem to demonstrate an awareness of the importance of friendships and the encouragement and support they provide is beginning to enable Becky to develop her social networks and subsequently utilise her own social capital. A further example of how the carers were promoting this is Becky's day out for her birthday that her carers arranged for her, a discussion of this day took place when she explained the following photograph that she had taken of a bar of chocolate.



Justin: *That's interesting, a big giant bar of chocolate. Let me guess, is this one of your birthday presents.*

Becky: *Yeah, from Harriet one of my friends at sea cadets and it is massive I still have some in the fridge!*

Justin: *So it was your birthday a couple of days ago and you had a party?*

Becky: *Yeah, my mates came we all got in the car and went to the water park and the cinema and then pizza hut.*

Justin: *Right sounds busy.*

Becky: *Yeah and then we came back in, had the party, well we just chilled in the conservatory with music and then had some more food and then chilled again.*

Justin: *So how many friends did you have over then?*

Becky: *Five. Actually six friends.*

Justin: *What was that like?*

Becky: *Good. Really cool we went swimming, then on the water slides...*

Justin: *So you went there, then for a movie and a pizza and then you all came back here. So your friends were with you most of the day, then.*

Becky: *Yeah, we went there at 9:00 went to the cinema and got back here then they left about 8 or 9 and Harriet stayed over*

Justin: *Sounds good. Have other foster carers you lived with, have they done stuff like that for you before, organised days like that for you on your birthdays.*

Becky: *Last year, I had tea with some mates, and it was at Marion and Steve's. But before my friends came, during the day we went to the museum just me Gary and the carers.*

Justin: So on your birthday, would you say foster carers do good stuff for you?

Becky: Yeah, the ones that we've had so far.



Justin: Wow, that's a big bag, what was in it?

Becky: Oh, yeah, that was a photo frame that I can put all my pictures of my friends in, I got one for family now I have one for my friends.

Justin: So, if you were to give this birthday a mark out of 10, what would you give it?

Becky: Nine.

Justin: Nine, pretty good then. Pretty good, a good birthday.

Becky: Yep! A good birthday.

The carers in this instance promoted and facilitated Becky's social participation in ways that are importantly fun for her and her friends, but also with activities that could be deemed appropriate, or even pro-social, for young people to participate in. Bourdieu explains how cultural capital interplays with both economic capital and social capital to play a significant part in determining a person's position in a social field. For Becky to be able to negotiate the cultural practices around going to the water park and eating at the pizza restaurant with her friends enables her to develop skills that subsequently benefit her access to social capital. These activities in some ways reflect not only Becky's access to levels of cultural, social and economic capital, but also highlight the carer's access to capital and their ability to pass this on to the children in their care. Due to the costs access to some activities can be prohibitive for children living in poverty (Ridge 2002) and this reinforces Bourdieu's (1986) point that economic capital has a multiplier effect in the fungibility of symbolic forms of capital. Becky is developing her network connections and acquiring the cultural capital to negotiate social practices, such as eating at restaurants and attending the cinema. The opportunity to be able to engage in these practices presents as being important for Becky and they serve to facilitate her access to social capital. However, without access to appropriate stocks of symbolic capital, and ultimately the access to money, she could have been limited and unable to fully acquire or utilise the social connections she had made at school.

Bourdieu (1984) highlights how parents can be key in the transmission of capital and how they engage in practices that develop their children's habitus, which in turn furnishes them with the skills to engage in practices that enable access to social and cultural capital. Findings suggest that Becky's foster carers are indeed engaging in similar practices to ensure that the

children in their care are developing their access to these symbolic forms of capital. It is important to highlight again that even though both Gary and Becky are starting to acquire access to social capital and indeed utilise it for support they still seem to be at the beginning of a process. For example, Gary is twelve and Becky is fourteen years old, the activities they have started to engage in within their long term placement, having friends home to visit after school or at weekends and starting to join clubs, which they described in detail and spoke about with enthusiasm, are something that most five year olds in the UK experience once they start attending school. However, Becky and Gary's experiences demonstrate that even though they have had disrupted networks with a fractured sense of belonging and a lack of opportunity to engage in activities, with some support from their carers, they show they can still endeavor to build access to social capital and indeed utilise it, in order to gain support from friends.

Memorialisation: continuing bonds within a disrupted network

The data presented so far in this chapter highlights that the young people's experiences of living within disrupted social networks provides challenges to the way they maintain their relationships on a physical level. However, the findings in this part of the chapter illustrate how actively engaged some of the young people are in practices that memorialise and continue their bonds with people in their network on an emotional level. The following data shows that even though relationships may initially present as being limited or lost in a physical sense it is evident they actually serve as a valuable source of bonding social capital in an imagined or emotional sense. The practices of memorialisation that are presented in this section of the chapter were of particular importance to those young people whose social capital in a physical sense was significantly constrained or severed through experiences such as adoption or even bereavement. Despite the fact that these continuing bonds exist primarily, or in certain cases entirely, on an

emotional level they represented a powerful source of bonding social capital. For example, Jade provided an account of her love of horse riding, which illustrated the relational importance of leisure activities and how they can highlight the significance of relationships, not only in the present but also in the past.

Justin: Ok so what about things that you do, things that you are most interested in?

Jade: Horse riding ,well when I was living with Angela I started horse riding and I was doing it for about three years and I stopped it because I moved to Sharon's and she couldn't get me there and I haven't really started again but I still love doing it.

Justin: Right so it is something you did in the past that you liked doing?

Jade: Yeah, I love it

Justin: How often did you use to do it?

Jade: Every two weeks

Justin: What did you do, did you look after the horse and all that stuff?

Jade: I err tacked it up, then groomed it and did its feet and washed it if it needed to, and did the feed and like cleaned the stables out. It was hard work but a laugh, and I loved being around the horses.

Justin: And did you actually get to ride it as well?

Jade: Yeah I used to jump it and canter it was fun yeah...

Justin: ... and you say you did that every couple of weeks

Jade: Yeah for about three months, it's quite an expensive thing to do horse riding.

When asked about the activities that were most important to her, Jade went straight to horse riding without hesitation. By Jade's estimations she went horse riding every two weeks for a period of three months in her previous placement, this means that she went in total around six times. It became apparent in the second interview why these six sessions of horse riding are so significant and important for Jade and this is evident in the following extract where she talks about her mother who had died, shortly before she came into care:-

Justin: What was your Mum like? Tell me about your Mum.

Jade: Pretty

Justin: Was she?

Jade: Yeah and she loved horses.

Justin: Oh so that explains about your love of horse riding.

Jade: Yeah, like we used to walk hours trying to find somewhere for me to go riding.

Justin: Really?

Jade: Yeah, my Mum was so insistent that I went but we never found anyone.

Justin: So she wanted you to learn how to ride horses and stuff?

Jade: Yeah, because she used to work at a stable when she was 17.

The activity of horse riding could therefore be seen as a metaphor for Jade's relationship with her mother. The metaphor enables her to start talking about her mother, which is something she acknowledged earlier in the interview that she did not do very often, stating she '*did not want to make people feel upset or awkward by talking about her Mum*'. Across the two

interviews Jade's mother presented as the most important relationship in her life and she expresses a strong attachment to her and provided examples of the ways she preserves her memory. Jade's relationship with her mother can be understood as a continuing bond (Klass et al. 1996; Valentine 2008), which means despite the relationship ending in a physical sense, she works hard in many ways to preserve her relationship and continue her bond with her mother on an emotional level. For Jade her continuing bond with her mother acts as a powerful symbolic and memorialised form of bonding social capital and even though the relationship that has ended in a physical sense, due to finality of death, it is still of great value to her and as such a resource.

The relationship between Jade and her mother could be viewed through the lens of attachment theory and the important bond between the two could be analysed. However, by studying the young people's experiences more broadly, through the concept of social capital, it is evident in the findings how young people continue their bonds more with people right across their social network. For example, returning to Nicola, during her second interview she presented the following photograph of her cuddly toy collection. On first glance this may seem like a common shelf with a collection of cuddly toys that one might expect to find in a twelve year old's bedroom. However, the following excerpt highlights the importance of this display and the symbolic meaning attached to each and every toy, her relationship with them and the people that they represent.



Justin: Let's move on to the next photo. So that's a close up on the teddy bears.

Nicola: All my teddies. I've took them everywhere I gone....

Justin: So where do they all originate from?

Nicola: That Chelsea bear is important to me because that's my first ever bear.

Justin: Really?

Nicola: Yeah I had it when I was a baby.

Justin: Oh ok you had it when you were a baby?

Nicola: Yeah, my Mum's always supported Chelsea. I used to have a little Chelsea football kit. I think my Mum's still got it. It was like diddy. The shorts are like that big.

Justin: So a little kit that you used to wear when you were a baby?

Nicola: Yeah, and she got me that teddy and that was in my baby photos next to me all the time. So I've kept that Chelsea bear because my Mum gave it to me to take with me when we left and came into care.

Justin: ok so that's your Chelsea Bear.

Nicola: And this one was last Christmas – my teddy. That one I've had since I was a baby. That one I got from my granddad when I first met him. That one I got this Christmas. It's like an elephant teddy but the elephant was in my bed. This one was my brother's teddy and he gave it to me when I left his house. So he's got like a teddy that he gave me.

Justin: So you were living together in foster care?

Nicola: Yeah, this was Leon because he thought I was going to forget him.

Justin: Right, so he made you take his teddy with you?

Nicola: Yeah. This one I got from my first carer when she went to Australia. It's like a teddy and you press its hand and you talk to it, and it says it back to you in a weird voice. This one was my Nan's teddy. She gave it to me when we first came into care. I don't know why. And this one I got for my 9th birthday and it sings 'Happy Birthday' to you.

Justin: So every one of these teddies – it's not like you could go down the shop and replace all these teddies.

Nicola: I couldn't replace them. I have to keep them...

Justin: There's like a story behind every one is there? So they're really special things to you?

Nicola: Yeah, teddies and photos are my special things.

Justin: What about when you're 40 years old Nicola, where would these teddies be?

Nicola: They'd be still on my bedroom shelf. They're not going anywhere.

The brief of the photo project was to take photographs of the places and things most important to you; the excerpt above highlights just why these toys are important. It is apparent from the transcript that these toys are in effect a display of Nicola's important relationships across her network; they show her connections to family, her mother, her siblings, her grandmother, as well as her previous carers.

Returning to Samuel, in his second interview, three of the ten photographs that he had taken were of framed photograph montages that he kept in his room on a chest of drawers. The photographs presented as a symbolic representation of his social networks. In one of the frames he had his family, including his mother his grandparents and his aunts and uncles. In another frame there was a mixture of photographs that included family members and also previous foster carers. Samuel explained the importance of a photograph that he took, which was an image of his previous carer, unfortunately it cannot be reproduced due to issues of confidentiality. However, Samuel provides the following explanation of why the photograph is important.

Justin: So what is in this photo?

Samuel: Well that's me obviously and that's Dave and that's Angie

Justin: Why did you choose to take this one?

Samuel: Well Beth took the photo but my last carers got it framed and gave it to me so I would remember them when I came here

Justin: Right, it looks like you are all having fun, so what it is going on tell me about.

Samuel: Well that is Angie as backstop and Dave bowling the ball and I am about to hit the ball... far!

Justin: So you are playing rounders?

Samuel: Yeah, and the other people they are Dave and Angie's Son and his friends and some other kids.

Justin: Where was this taken?

Samuel: It was down the park in Town we played for ages... Dave was a good laugh they were good carers.

Justin: And you left there to come here because they retired is that right?

Samuel: Yeah... I liked it there.

Samuel also had a photograph of his old rugby team that he played for when he lived in his last placement, which he presented in the interview, alongside a photograph of his rugby trophy shown below.



Like Nicola's teddy bears and photographs, Samuel's collection of personal possessions, his photographs and his trophy represent his social network and they are displayed in his bedroom. The practices that Samuel engaged in to display his possessions showed the value he had for his relationships. In this instance his relationships from the past with his old carers that he no longer sees and the rugby team he no longer plays for.

Returning to Jade, the following photograph that she presented during the photo elicitation interview was of her collection of angels, the excerpt from the transcript that follows highlights the importance that she places on displaying them.



Jade: Yeah, that one and the one at the end they're my Mum's. And then like the four ones sitting down holding their face, I bought them. My friend bought me the silver one and that one I bought myself. That one I bought myself. And that one my Dad bought me. I've got a gold one as well that my carer bought me.

Justin: So I'll bet these two that were your Mum's, obviously they are important ones are they?

Jade: Yeah, I've got more upstairs she got me too, but I just can't fit them all in one picture.

Justin: Really? You've got more of them have you?

Jade: I've got a really high one...like that, and then my Mum got me one another one and it's on a horse and swings, and they glow up...

Justin: So your Mum liked them

Jade: Yeah, and my Mum just got me into them so now I love them and now everyone knows I love them so I get them as presents.

The display of angels is important to Jade because, as she describes, her mother got her 'into them'. For Jade it serves as a memorial to her mother and enables her to continue her bond with her. Furthermore, when I asked Jade to tell me about the angels she chose to recall who gave them to her, so they also serve a secondary purpose of reinforcing her relationships with the people who are close to her and recognise the importance of the memorial to her mother that Jade displays. For example, as Jade explains, the angels were gifts from people close in her network such as the friend who bought the silver one, her dad who bought her one and also her previous carer.

Justin: They must be some of your most special things that you own I would imagine.

Jade: Yeah, I got loads of my Mum's clothes as well and they just smell of her so I just sit there literally smelling them.

Justin: Really

Jade: Yeah, I love that... all that stuff's like really important to me

Justin: Do you ever get a chance to talk about your Mum to anyone?

Jade: No. I don't talk to my Dad because he's too busy with his new girlfriend.

Justin: Do you talk to your carer about her?

Jade: I would talk to my old carer but no one else

Justin: That's a really nice photo thanks for sharing that. I was just thinking, where did you have them before when you were with your other carers?

Jade: Oh, on my chest of drawers? It was huge. It was like the width of this table, and then it was like...that. And so it was just totally filled up with fairies and angels...

Justin: So all this stuff, do you think you started to getting into them and collecting them more... to sort of remember your Mum as well?

Jade: Yeah and then I've got like two of my Mum's 'meaty' teddies and she's also got me in to them.

Justin: What is that, sorry?

Jade: A meaty

Justin: What are those?

Jade: Like grey and they have a blue nose, and a patch on their face. And then like on their foot they have 'meaty' written on them.

Justin: And did she get them for you?

Jade: No, she got them given to her and then they passed to me when she died. One of them says to a special Mum, I think I got it for Mother's Day or something. Then there was like one with a blue hat with like little snowballs at the end that my Dad got her.

Justin: So you keep lots of things to sort of remember your Mum by?

Jade: Yeah. I got like a whole bag of them.

Justin: But listening to you talk about them I see you got a big smile on your face. You didn't have a big smile on your face when I turned up and you were talking about moving placement. So they are obviously are really important to you those things and they also make you happy.

Jade: Yeah, and now we're packing up again.

Justin: How are you going to pack all these up when you move on?

***Jade:** Well I do have at least 6 or 7 bags when I move so I have quite a few bags. And I even have to carry stuff separately sometimes like my teddies. It's quite hard. So I try to move as little as possible. It's quite hard to move because I've got to get everything into a car and stuff.*

***Justin:** Yeah, because it looks like all your things about all those pictures and the angels, you've really taken care of them as well. Do you know what I mean?*

***Jade:** I'm kind of scared that I'm going to forget them or something so they always go in the bag first before my clothes. Sometimes I get my carers to pack them so if something breaks or gets lost I can blame them.*

Given that these displays of possessions enable Jade to continue her bond with her mother, it is perhaps unsurprising that they hold such significance. Jade has been in care four years and has lived with four different carers, so it is perhaps understandable that she has some anxiety about her possessions when her experience of foster care is a transient one, moving from placement to placement.

Returning to Anna, the following excerpt from an email written by her social worker provides an example of how a young person's possessions can be lost during the move into care.

For your information, her two younger siblings have just been placed for adoption (so contact has ended) and her other sister is in a separate long term foster placement (they will have contact). Her mother, mat granddad and mat uncle are in prison and her mat gran is on community service and has alcohol issues.

Her father is said to have gone "downhill" with his own drug use etc. The family home has recently been taken over by housing and cleared of its contents and I am still trying to find out if they boxed up personal possessions such as photos which Anna wanted. Housing said that dad went

in to get things and I have written asking him (I am just telling you this as it is something Anna will state is important to her).

The social worker highlights in this email that Anna is experiencing complex family dynamics, and this includes the recent significant upheaval of being separated from her sibling group. Previous data presented in this section of the chapter has highlighted how other young people were able to utilise their possessions to maintain and develop their access to social capital through practices of memorialisation. However, as the social worker highlights, for Anna her move into foster care has resulted in her also losing access to possessions that are important to her, which could have enabled her to maintain her relationships and social capital, albeit in a memorialised form. As the social worker predicted, both of these significant issues were something that arose in the interview and the following transcript excerpts, in this concluding part of the chapter, highlight the impact of this from Anna's perspective.

Justin: *When you first went into foster care you were placed with your sisters?*

Anna: *Yeah.*

Justin: *Where was Ronnie?*

Anna: *He wasn't born at first. Mum was in labour when we came into care*

Justin: *That's right, okay.*

Anna: *And then when he was born he went to someone else's.*

Justin: *So he's gone to foster care.*

Anna: *Yeah, but they've just been adopted now.*

Justin: *What, all three of them?*

Anna: Yeah.

Justin: Have they all been adopted?

Anna: No, Chloe's's been long-term fostered, and Ronnie and Samantha have been adopted.

Justin: What do you think of that though?

Anna: Don't know.

Justin: So Chloe's long-term fostered. So you'll get to see her still won't you?

Anna: Yeah.

Justin: So when was the last time you saw her?

Anna: About two weeks ago.

Justin: Yeah. What did you do?

Anna: We went to a service station.

Justin: A service station?

Anna: Yes.

Justin: What was that like?

Anna: Boring.

Justin: How old is Chloe?

Anna: 10.

Justin: So you both went to a service station, what one?

Anna: On the motorway.

Justin: Right. Who was that with?

Anna: All the carers, it was our first time meeting both in placements.

Justin: So there was like a lot of adults there as well then.

Anna: Yeah.

Justin: Did you get a chance to talk to her?

Anna: Yeah.

Justin: Yeah... Does she understand about the little ones being adopted would you say?

Anna: I don't really think it bothers her, not in a horrible way but she doesn't really understand it.

Justin: Right.

Anna: She doesn't realise how big a thing it is.

Justin: What about you, what do you make of it then..

Anna: I've always said that I'll look for them when they're 18 though... So I think it is just a couple of years.

Justin: Then you'll get back together, you will go and find them.

Anna: Yeah.

Justin: And will you get any contact with them at all, like through letters or anything like that?

Anna: Well I thought I was going to be getting photos every year. That's what my social worker said. But it turns out that I'm not.

Justin: You're not going to get that, no? But you were told that at one point was you?

Anna: Yeah

Justin: Right. What's that like then, when you've been told you're going to get photos and then..?

Anna: Well it's really, really upsetting. I started crying about it.

Justin: Yeah. I can understand that, did they explain to you why?

Anna: Yeah, they can't because like ... I don't know ... identity or something

Through the practice of adoption Anna had lost a physical connection with her siblings. However, her hopes for reunification were strongly expressed; the strength of her bond with her siblings and her desire to find them in the future was clearly expressed. This significant disruption to her relationships could make the loss of possessions such as photographs for Anna more keenly felt. Her ongoing attempts to retrieve these possessions through her social worker may have resulted in the practitioner's need to send me an email prior to meeting with Anna in order to make me aware of the issue. Anna has been in care for a year and has been in two different placements, yet she was still awaiting personal possessions that she left at home. Anna's newly appointed social worker clearly had an awareness of the importance that Anna placed on getting her possessions back, and the social worker had made attempts to locate these possessions. However, as previously highlighted, the data in this study highlights the important role that possessions can play in young people's preserving and maintaining relationships. Therefore, it is apparent that during these twelve months in foster care Anna's ability to engage in practices of memorialisation, through her possessions such as the photographs she requested, has meant her ability to utilise her sources of social capital to help her get by during this time of such disruption have been impaired.



Justin: *Tell me about this teddy bear.*

Anna: *I love him, I sleep with him all the time.*

Justin: *Really? And where does he originate from?*

Anna: *I got it here, but it's like my old one that I had at home which I haven't got.*

Justin: *So it's like a replacement for a teddy that you had?*

Anna: *Yeah.*

Justin: *So who got you this?*

Anna: *Dani my foster care got me that one.*

Justin: *Nice. So Dani got you a teddy bear and it reminds you of a teddy you had when you were younger?*

Anna: Yeah, but it's a bit lighter. My other one was really dark and I used to call it Chocolate.

Justin: Okay. Right. What happened to that one?

Anna: It's still at my old house.

Justin: Right, because you were saying there was stuff there that you can't get.

Anna: Yeah.

Justin: Have you had any news on that, where it is or anything?

Anna: Nope. I keep asking

In the excerpt above it does seem that Anna's new foster carer was sensitive to the impact that these lost possessions have had on Anna. This is apparent in the carers attempt to replace these lost possessions with the substitute teddy bear in the photo above, as well as the replacement of Anna's favourite dvd's in the photograph below.



These attempts to replace the items whilst waiting for Anna's original possessions to be tracked down, appears to be good practice on behalf of the carers and this seemed to be recognised as such and valued by Anna. However, despite the new carer's good practice, it does raise the question how Anna could have gone for over twelve months without these items being tracked down, or any contingency identified to replace them, by the adults caring for her during these most unsettled of times.

Conclusion

Findings in this chapter have shown that network disruption can have the potential to adversely affect young people's ability to participate in leisure activities, which could have an impact on their ability to access important sources of social capital. Despite this the findings address *research objective 3*, as they show how young people are able to make continual attempts to often build on the resources they had to join their peers in

activities, which were importantly heavily networked, therefore, potentially a source of social capital. There are clear lessons to learn from the good practice highlighted in this chapter, particularly where carers enabled the young people to build their friendships and develop their networks through participation in a range of leisure opportunities. Lessons can also be learned from the experiences of the young people whose attempts to participate in activities appeared to either go unnoticed or unsupported by their social workers and carers. This occurred where adults seemingly privileged certain forms of activity over another, for example, sea cadets over online gaming. In doing this the adults appeared to be impacting on the young people's attempts to develop their friendships, networks and subsequently their potential access to social capital.

The findings also reinforce that for young people in foster care their personal possessions can be of great importance. For example, what on first glance was a photograph of a pile of teddy bears was actually a representation, in fact a memorial of past relationships. This is an important finding that addresses *research objective 2*, as these possessions allowed the young people to preserve an important source of bonding social capital that helped them get by. Although there was some evidence that carers and social workers understood and treated the young people's possessions as valuable. In Anna's case where she went a year before getting replacements to those items, that held such symbolic importance for her, and this was clear evidence that more could be done. In the discussion chapter that follows, this is explored further in a section which highlights that young people's possessions enable them to continue on important bonds and as such should be understood as representing a valuable source of capital. Therefore, when a young person's possessions are lost or missing their access to bonding social capital is potentially impaired.

Part 4 Implications for policy and practice

The final part of this thesis is presented across the following two chapters. Chapter 8 builds on the analysis so far, by discussing key themes and their implications for social work policy and practice. Chapter 9 concludes the thesis by presenting a synthesis of the research process, in order to highlight what these findings mean for the discipline of social work.

Chapter 8 Discussion

This chapter begins by addressing the research objectives, and the overall research question. Then three key themes from the findings are discussed; (1) the importance of listening to children; (2) stigma and the benefits of peer support; (3) young people's capacity to preserve, maintain and build social capital. The chapter concludes by highlighting what this thesis means for the discipline of social work and presents five key messages for social work policy and practice.

The research objectives and the research question

The themes of social capital that were identified in chapter 2 provided the basis for the five research objectives, which were expressed in the form of questions. Each of the objectives is restated below and they are accompanied with examples of relevant findings, from the previous three chapters, in order to demonstrate how the objectives have been met.

(1) Do young people in foster care manage their relationships in their social networks and if so how?

These young people in foster care managed their relationships in their social networks and they achieve this in multifaceted ways. For example, in chapter 5, findings are presented that show the efforts young people make to preserve their pre-existing relationships with people in their social networks. Furthermore, findings indicate when challenges such as risk or stigma arise they adapt and find ways to continue to manage their relationships in their social networks. For example, at the time of the interviews Web 2.0 technologies acted as important modes of communication to enable this.

(2) Do young people in foster care engage in practice to access bonding and bridging social capital?

The thesis has provided numerous examples of how young people in foster care engage in practices within their homogenous groupings to access the emotional support that bonding social capital provides. For example, this is evident in chapter 7, where young people engage in practices of memorialisation to preserve their continuing bonds with the people in the network with whom they are closest.

However, data did not suggest that young people were engaging a great deal, in practices to build or access bridging social capital. The relative absence of findings in relation to this is indeed a finding in itself. As Putnam (2001) explains bridging social capital is the sociological WD-40 that helps you get ahead. The concept has been explained through the work of Granovetter (1973) as it closely relates to his argument about the importance of weak ties that are network connections outside of your homogenous group, which he argues can assist people if they are searching for employment. This may suggest that these processes that help you get ahead are perhaps more visible or more easily understood in transitions into employment. Therefore, their absence in the accounts of these young peoples' experience is perhaps understandable given in the UK practices in employment are predominantly within adult structures.

(3) In what ways are young people in foster care participating in socially networked activities?

As chapter 6 highlights, at times young people are engaging in practices that are completely ordinary and are seemingly in keeping with their peer group.

For example, by utilising Web 2.0 technologies to message or play games online with their friends. However, the ordinary nature of these practices is in itself extraordinary, due to the circumstances of foster care in which the young people are growing up. For example, this often means they have faced challenges in the past such as experiences of abuse and neglect, which is compounded during their time in care where they often experience multiple placement moves and separation from their siblings. In chapter 7, the findings show how that despite these challenging experiences, they are able to persevere and make continual attempts to participate in a range of leisure activities. The importance of these activities is that they often involve socially networked practices and such they can serve to offer access to social capital.

(4) Are young people engaging in practices of reciprocity within their social networks?

There was evidence in the data that young people were engaged in mutually supportive relationships with their peers. The purpose of these were mainly for emotional support and as findings in chapter 6 illustrate, it was most apparent amongst in-groups of fostered young people who shared and managed a stigmatized status. These acts of reciprocity serve as a powerful way to challenge the potential exclusion that stigma can bring. They illustrate the potential resource within a social network of young people in foster care; as such these acts of reciprocity are an indicator that social capital is being accessed.

(5) Do young people in foster care express a sense of belonging?

The young people in the study did express a sense of belonging and this was often inextricably linked to the notion of bonding social capital. Findings suggest that for young people in foster care the notion of belonging was complex and was located in various different places for example, to their schools, their old neighbourhoods, and their foster carers. As previously highlighted a number of young people also found a strong sense of belonging with other young people in foster care.

However, the key finding in relation to this is just how strong the young peoples' sense of belonging was to their birth families. The findings demonstrate that a young person's physical contact with their family can be supervised, constrained or even severed but the bonds continue on.

The research question

The following brief statement highlights what these objectives mean for the overall research question?

Do young people in foster care engage in practices within their social networks that enable them to maintain and build their access to social capital, and if so how?

The findings that have been presented have detailed the nuanced, multifaceted ways that young people in foster care engage in practices in their social networks to preserve, maintain and build their relationships. These practices then serve to enable them to access the resource social capital.

The importance of listening to children and building relationships

The discussion that follows in the rest of this chapter elaborates further upon the findings presented so far, and it aims to highlight specific implications for the discipline of social work.

There has been a growing body of foster care literature over the past two decades that has in varying degrees, drawn on the experiences and voices of children and young people (Timms & Thoburn 2003; Schofield 2003; Holland et al. 2008; Stein 2012). This thesis contributes to this knowledge, which is important as it is children and young people who are at the centre of the practice of foster care.

As Williams and Rogers (2014) argue, the child rights agenda, alongside the work of contemporary scholars of childhood, has established the importance of conducting research with children and young people. The findings in this study reinforce this well-rehearsed point, by demonstrating that young people in foster care are active social agents engaged in a wide range of social practices to manage their relationships and networks. Furthermore, in order to capture the phenomena it was important to fully include them in the process, as it would not have been enough to examine the concept of social capital, in the context of young people's experiences of foster care, by privileging the views of the adults who are involved in the practice. This study has highlighted that by developing methodological approaches that build on young people's competence and that allow them to communicate their experiences, it is possible to access powerful accounts that are of importance to social work policy and practice.

However, it is also important to acknowledge that adults were needed in this research, they were vital in supporting the young people's participation in the study. For example, their support was crucial in making arrangements for the interviews. On occasion they also often offered

information that contextualised the young people's experiences. As Hart (2008, p.414) points out, 'the current reverence for "children's voices" should not cause us to overlook the need for thorough and broad-ranging analysis'. Therefore, although it is important to undertake research directly with children and young people it is also at times necessary to supplement their accounts with the insights of relevant adults, which could aid the analysis. However, balance is required, as over reliance on adult accounts of children's experiences is problematic. As the findings in this study have demonstrated, at times, they can get it wrong. For example, the time young people spent using Web 2.0 technologies was not recognised by adults as time managing relationships, networks and subsequently access to social capital.

By listening to young people in foster care, this study found important nuanced understandings of how they maintain their social networks and their access to social capital, in a context where the stability of their network is challenged. The findings demonstrate how young people are maintaining access to social capital in many subtle ways, for example, with displays of possessions that are a symbolic representation of their sometimes severed relationships. Without engaging with the young people directly this could potentially have been missed as the findings may not have been observable in any other way. Other witnesses to the experience of foster care are often caught up in the pressures of day to day social interactions; therefore, they can miss the significance of certain social practices that young people are engaged in. The findings illustrate the subtleties, and at times individual nature, of the young people's interactions and the way they managed their relationships, these interactions were of importance as they allowed the young people to maintain their access to social capital. Therefore, this has implications for social work because in order to observe

subtle, nuanced practices, a relationship of sufficient continuity and depth is required.

Relationship based casework has long been proposed as an important aspect of the social work profession (Biestek 1970). Research suggests that service users often remember the quality of the relationship that they had with their social worker rather than any specific intervention (Burgess et al. 2013; Rollnick 2002). However, commentators argue that a practitioner's ability to adopt a relationship based approach has been challenged with the impact of increasing managerialism, which has resulted in concerns that practice has become increasingly procedural and bureaucratic (Lymbery 2001). Despite these challenges, or perhaps because of these challenges, in recent years there has been a re-emergence of literature that advocates the need for relationship based approaches to practice in the field of child care social work (Ruch 2005; Burgess et al 2013). A number of scholars have examined the importance of the processes of social work intervention, how practitioners get involved in the lives of others and how the relationship impacts on understanding the service user's experience (Ruch 2005; Kendrick 2013; Höjer 2011; De Boer & Coady 2007).

Stein (2009) highlights that a specific threat to relationship based practice for practitioners who work with young people in care, is the limited time available to undertake direct work with children and young people. These challenges are compounded by ongoing issues in retaining children's social workers (Curtis et al. 2010) and rising caseloads (Schraer 2014). These tensions are evident in a forthcoming report from the Fostering Network, which will highlight that in a recent survey, foster carers reported that they felt the children in their care, needed to have better access to more consistent social workers who were more available to build relationships with children and young people (Sanders 2014b). Respondents in that survey also highlighted a need for social workers to develop improved communication

with foster carers, and more effective listening to what children and young people in foster care are saying (Sanders 2014).

Relationship based approaches to social work are of particular relevance to this thesis, because what the study has clearly observed is that young people in foster care are primarily concerned on a day to day basis with managing their relationships within their social networks. An example of the primacy of relationships for the young people was apparent when you consider Jade's attempts to memorialise and continue her bond with her Mother who had died. Therefore, procedural approaches to practice, that ignore the relationship would mean that social workers are not connecting with what young people in foster care are primarily engaged in, which the findings of this thesis has shown is managing their relationships and social networks. If social workers are not primarily interested in the relationships they are forming with the children and young people in their care, then, they are missing an opportunity to understand the needs of the children and young people they are working with. Furthermore, if children and young people are able to witness social workers using their skills and attempting to build relationships with them, this could potentially provide a valuable blue print for them. This could be important for young people and allow them to model, in their own relationships with their family and peers, both in the present and into their futures.

In this study, within the young people's accounts there is scarce reference to their social workers. Becky was one young person who spoke positively about her social worker and how she helped her one evening to attend her drama performance at the school. However, this experience was not representative across this sample. In fact of the ten young people who were asked to place all of the people that were important to them on their eco-maps; none of them chose to place their social workers on the map. The social workers remained predominantly absent in the data, and this is a

finding in itself and it suggests that a relationship approach to practice was not felt by the young people in this study.

It is important to differentiate at this point between the young people's relationships with their foster carers and social workers and to acknowledge that in the findings there were clear examples of foster carers endeavouring to build relationships with young people. This was evident when seven of the young people, placed either their current or previous carers on their eco maps. It was also evident that caring relationships were formed between carers and young people through the participant's descriptions of thoughtful support that foster carers offered, such as framing the young people's cherished photographs of their families and trying to make birthdays fun. Some of the young people clearly expressed their affection for their foster carers, Jade spoke about staying in contact with carers from the past on Facebook and Chrissie praised her foster carers supportive nature and her listening skills when she said 'she is proper good and she is trained to do it'. Some carers also tried to support young people to build their own relationships and maintain their networks, which in turn enabled them to develop their access to social capital. For example, Gary and Becky's carers enabled them to participate in formal leisure activities, such as sea cadets, and they also encouraged their relationships informally, by inviting friends home for tea and supporting trips into town.

However, there are also lessons to learn for foster carers where the support they provided young people to engage socially, could have been better. For example, it seemed that Luke's carer failed to recognise the value of Luke playing computer games as a socially networked activity. Luke's carer also missed the opportunity to support his hopes to socialise with his friends at the skate park, by allowing his BMX bike to lie rusting in the weeds.

Research objective one asked the following question. *Do young people in foster care manage their relationships in their social networks?* The theory predicted that in order for people to access the resource of social capital they are required to engage in efforts of ‘unceasing sociability’ (Bourdieu p.250) in their social network. The data exemplified this by showing the myriad ways in which young people preserved, managed and tried to build their relationships in their social networks. The findings reveal that for young people, the experience of foster care is all about relationships. Therefore, because of this, one of the key implications of this thesis for social work policy and practice is that, foster care interventions need to be all about relationships too. For practitioners building relationships with young people in foster care is crucial in order to understand and support the individual and subtle ways young people engage in practices that affect their access to social capital. Without a relationship of sufficient consistency and depth these practices could be misunderstood, poorly supported or at worse impaired by practitioners.

Stigma and the benefits of peer support

Findings presented in chapter 6, illustrated how stigma can affect the young people’s ability to engage in practices of social capital. For example, being in the stigmatized out-group of foster care can result in incidents of bullying that potentially leads to forms of social exclusion. Therefore, the stigma of being ‘in-care’ presented as a very real obstacle for children and young people, which had the potential to impair the development of their access to social capital.

However, despite these obstacles, findings also demonstrated that young people in foster care are active social agents who are problem solvers. The young people provided numerous examples of how they find ways to manage their identity and the challenge of stigma, in order to avoid any potential road blocks to their access to social capital. They actively managed

their spoiled identity, in the same ways as the adults in Goffman's (1968) thesis. They achieved this in two key ways; firstly, they attempt to carefully manage the disclosure of their in-care status with their non-fostered peers; secondly they lessen the impact of being excluded from the in-group, by forming their own in-groups with their fostered peers.

The young people in this study were adept in the ways they managed and disclosed their care status; they chose the appropriate information to share and carefully selected times to do this. Their disclosures served to strengthen friendships and bonds and when they did this successfully it enhanced close reciprocally supportive friendships, which are indicative of bonding social capital. For example, Nicola spoke of how the first time she disclosed her care status was to another young person in care, and she went on to describe how their relationship is so close they are 'like sisters'.

Forming their own in-groups with their fostered peers built an important source of bonding social capital. For example, Jack's closest friends were also in foster care and he referred to them as family too, they were very much at the centre of his social network. They offered him a sense of belonging at a time he was experiencing significant exclusion from his peers at school, due in part to his 'in-care' status. These two examples from the findings, again demonstrate young people's capacity to minimise the impact of stigma on their access to social capital.

In the young people's accounts there was clear evidence of how foster carers were helping to support young people with the challenge of stigma, often by bringing young people in foster care together. It is difficult to judge if these processes were designed in some way to help negate stigma and give the young people a sense of belonging, or if this was a happy by-product of social practices and interventions that actually had different intentions. These opportunities generated by the carers for fostered youth to come together, were at times arranged on an informal level. For example, fellow

carers met up socially and this provided opportunities for the young people across the placements to meet. Samuel spoke of how he met his best friend Lee through the carer's friendship, and he described how this enabled him to talk with another fostered young person about their experiences of care. The value in this opportunity is evident, if one considers the data that shows how carefully a person has to manage their stigmatized identity, being amongst others who understand, and in fact share the stigma, could mean the pressures of managing a spoiled identity are potentially lessened.

A number of the participants had relationships with their fostered peers and sharing their experiences of foster care and listening to the experiences of others, is evidence of reciprocally supportive relationships. This demonstrates that young people in foster care are engaging in acts of reciprocity within in their network. This is of significance for this thesis as the theoretical framework highlights that the presence of reciprocity within a network, suggests the presence of social capital. Reciprocity shows that the relationships are of value and can be drawn upon as a resource, in this instance the resource provided emotional support to deal with the challenge of stigma.

Another more formal example of fostered youth coming together was the local authority consultation group organised by the youth service. This group primarily aimed to promote the voice of children in care and to demonstrate that children and young people were involved in the design of service provision. However, the young people who attended this group spoke positively about the opportunity to share experiences with their peers, as such there appeared to be great value for the members of this group, in just being with others in care. So this formal intervention that was intended primarily as a forum for consultation was for the young people more important for providing a source of peer support, which gave them

membership to an in group and as such a potential source of bonding social capital.

A key message from the findings that has implications for social work policy and practice is the importance of peer support for young people in foster care and its role in negating stigma, which serves as an obstacle to sources of social capital. Therefore, it is argued in this thesis that interventions need to be developed that increase the opportunities for peer support for young people in foster care. This could be delivered through existing interventions and groups, but peer support should be made an explicit aim, as the data in this study highlights the process of bringing young people in foster care together has value and should be promoted in and of its self.

In light of these findings social workers and foster carers need to be mindful of the potential benefits of peer relationships, and to wherever possible support and encourage the reciprocally supportive friendships that young people in foster care are making with their peers. It is evident in the findings that for the young people, social relationships with their peers in foster care are an adaptive response to the challenge of stigma. It offers a protection from the exclusory potential of stigma and serves as a way to preserve and maintain access to relationships and networks, which can subsequently provide access to social capital.

Building on young people's capacity to preserve and develop bonding social capital

Bonding social capital is at the core of a person's social network, it provides the emotional support that helps people get by on a day to day basis (Putnam 2001). Young people in foster care are likely to have experienced trauma through abuse or neglect (Schofield 2003; Kelly & Gilligan 2000). These potentially traumatic experiences can have a significant

impact on a young person's emotional development (Dowling 2014). Therefore, it is important for social work to ensure that interventions promote the emotional wellbeing of children and young people in care. For that reason, it is essential to learn from the ways that children and young people are accessing their bonding social capital in order to consider how their capacity to do this can be increased. This is important as it could provide young people with a means of accessing resources that can provide emotional support. Putnam (2001) explains bonding social capital exists within networks of people who share a degree of homogeneity. The previous section highlighted the potential emotional support that young people can access through their relationships with their peers 'in-care', with whom they share a homogeneity of experiences. Findings also demonstrate that young people in care have capacity to preserve and develop their pre-existing homogenous networks of friends and extended family members, which they were embedded in before their entry into foster care. They arrive into care from networks, and although elements of those networks may well be unsettled and at times chaotic, within them there is still social capital. These networks are often where a young person in foster care identifies a sense of belonging and from that they can draw a source of emotional support; as such for the young people pre-existing networks can provide valuable bonding social capital.

By virtue of the fact that the young people move from the care of their parents to that of foster carers, network disruption occurs. However, the findings show that young people have a remarkable capacity to overcome this disruption. Despite facing significant obstacles, they can make successful attempts to minimise the potentially negative effects of disruption, and in so doing they preserve their access to social capital, and in particular their bonding social capital with their homogenous groups. Findings, illustrate the myriad ways that they do this, at times they preserve their access to

social capital, just like everyone else, by engaging in the most prosaic of ongoing practices with people in their networks. For example, this can be through practices as mundane as sending a text message to a family member, or by simply adding a 'like' to a friend's Facebook status update. However, on other occasions the practices are at times nothing short of heroic, with young people demonstrating a real ongoing commitment to maintaining and preserving relationships, which keeps their access to their bonding social capital alive. For example, Nicola, Jade and Samuel achieved this with their displays of possessions in their bedrooms that symbolically represented relationships, which served to continue their bonds with people important to them. Whether these practices are best described as heroic or prosaic, is to a certain degree immaterial, because what is extraordinary and what holds the lessons for social work policy and practice, is how the young people persevere and maintain their networks. It is essential to learn from the ways that children and young people are accessing these resources in their networks, in order to consider how their capacity to do this can be increased.

It seems that it is not until a person's relationships in their social network are disrupted that it becomes evident how much value there is in them, and how much they are needed. Consider the following metaphor about the physical act of breathing, an act we can take for granted. There is a certain level of work involved in breathing, we breathe harder when our bodies work harder and breathe slower when our bodies are relaxing. However, it is more often than not, only when we are in some way deprived of breath that we are reminded how fundamentally important it is for our existence. A human body has an inherent biological understanding of the need for breathing it is a necessity to survive. The findings in this study suggest that for these young people in foster care their need to maintain connections and to build relationships presented as having become in some

way inherent within them, it was ingrained in their dispositions, their habitus. These ongoing, tacit practices are continual. For example, the young people are making sense of their identity through their relationships with the people in their social networks on a day to day basis. For some of the young people these relationships were with people they had little contact with. For example, Jack expressed a strong sense of belonging to his birth family and whilst experiencing his much disrupted journey through care with multiple placements, Jack worked hard to preserve bonds to his birth family. However, this was on an entirely imagined level and was reinforced through his relationship with the photographs of his family in his life story book, which provided some answers to his questions, about where he felt he should belong. However, it also served to leave him with questions as he was unsure where his brothers were, where his mother was and how his father died.

These findings reinforce the point that interventions such as life story work should be seen as an ongoing process, it is not a scrapbook to be done and then left on a shelf but a developing narrative that is 'added to and embellished' as children grow and mature (Golding 2007, p.65). Findings show that people seem to have a tacit drive to preserve and maintain their access to their bonding social capital, through access to people in their social networks with whom they have a strong sense of belonging. If one considers the pull that people who are born to sperm donors have to connect with their biological family (Turner & Coyle 2000) it becomes understandable why these young people, who had all spent some period of time during their childhood with their birth families, often locate their sense of belonging in their pasts, with relationship in their networks that endure.

Therefore, there is a need for practitioners and carers to understand the behaviours and practices that young people engage in are an attempt to preserve their relationships with people from the past. This thesis provides

evidence of young people adapting to their circumstances, attempting, like most other people would in their situation, to preserve their relationships, networks and their access to bonding social capital. In relation to practice and policy, the young peoples' need to preserve and to continue bonds has implications for the ways social work supports a child or young person in foster care, particularly, when they first enter care and transition from one set of networked relationships to another. The theoretical framework and the subsequent analysis in this thesis would suggest that the least disruption to a young person's social network would be best for their access to social capital. It follows that this would most likely occur if a placement was in their local area, as this would enable them to remain embedded in their social network and where they can continue to access their social capital.

Anna's experiences highlight, how for her, the network disruption of entering care was amplified by her twelve month 'out of county' placement, and how it resulted in her 'not having a social life'. This resulted in her having restricted access to her friends, a part of her social network that represented her existing bonding social capital, which could have provided emotional support at a difficult time. Anna's move into foster care was in an emergency, at the time her mother was in hospital giving birth to her sister, whilst she was also withdrawing from heroin. Entry into public care often occurs in this kind of unplanned way, with 75% of placements being made in an emergency (Sinclair 2005). The ability of agencies to respond to these unplanned placements is limited as there is an estimated shortage of 9000 available carers in the UK (Community Care 2013), which results in this lack of placement choice (Holland 2005) and often resulting in siblings being separated (Action for Children 2014) and potentially being moved away from local areas. For over twenty years, previous researchers, commentators and campaign groups have all highlighted the longstanding shortage of available foster carers and the need to increase the numbers in order to

improve placement choice. (Sanders 2014a; The Fostering Network 2014; Maclay et al. 2006; Bebbington & Miles 1990; Randle et al. 2014). The findings in this thesis support the need for more carers as increasing placement choice could minimise disruption to young peoples' social networks and their subsequent access to social capital.

However, the findings in this thesis also have an added value and a utility for foster care practice, as they provide insights into the ways to best support those young people who are in the foster care system now. The system has shortages, a lack of placement choice and that is often responsible for disrupting networks at the entry point into care, and then compounding this experience with multiple moves.

Therefore, in order to minimise this disruption it is important for social workers to assess the impact that placement choices have had on each individual child or young person's relationships within their social networks. Because, if these factors are considered and understood, ways forward can be identified that can better support and enable children and young people to best engage in practices to preserve their relationships, networks and subsequently their bonding social capital. For example, if one examines Anna's experience of her 'out of county' placement, it highlights how she was preserving her friendships through the use of Facebook and also how she was impaired in memorialising important past relationships due to her missing personal possessions. Anna's experiences typify the experiences of a number of the other young people working hard on her own to maintain her relationships, but who could have undoubtedly been better supported to manage her disrupted networks common experience in foster care.

The following two subsections focus on specific areas that social work needs to consider in order best support young people in foster care who face the common experience of disrupted social networks. These subsections

highlight how young people were engaging in practices that helped them maintain and develop their social networks and access to bonding social capital. The focus of these sections is not simply to reiterate and summarise the findings that were discussed in the previous chapters, but to consider current policy and practice responses in these specific areas and to look to how these may be improved. The first subsection considers the importance of Web 2.0 technologies in the day to day lives of the young people in foster care. The second subsection highlights the role that personal possessions play in enabling young people to continue their bonds with the people in their networks who are most important to them, which allows them to preserve their access to social capital.

Web 2.0: The neglected benefits of social media

As the findings have highlighted throughout, the young people in this study had all experienced separation from their family, most of them had moved away from their neighbourhoods and some had even changed their schools. Their face to face contact with their family was often arranged and supervised by adults, yet they were able to expertly manage a range of indirect contact with their family and friends themselves. The ways they achieved this were primarily through the use of Web 2.0 technologies, such as BBM instant messaging, Facebook and online games, which proved to be important tools that provided them with an opportunity to exercise agency in order to maintain relationships.

Web 2.0 technologies enabled the young people to decide how they communicated with the people in their social network, which served to preserve their access to sources of social capital that could have been lost. As Bourdieu (1986) explained the accumulation of social capital and its maintenance requires work, an ongoing unceasing effort of sociability. The young people in this study demonstrate that when obstacles arise that could potentially limit that sociability, they can adapt and attempt to overcome

them. In this instance and at this specific time, the participants utilised social media to facilitate this drive to be sociable and build relationships. For example, Jade's was unable to see her friends from her old school, as she was placed out of the area, yet she managed to keep the friendships going and continue the bonds with people close to her through interactions on Facebook. If you recall Jade explained that she 'spent her day waiting' for her friends to get out of school so she could talk to them on Facebook, which shows the importance she placed on these interactions mediated through the technology.

For children and young people in general, there are complexities in using Web 2.0 technologies, which include both challenges and benefits (Livingstone & Haddon 2009). The findings in this study suggest that these complexities exist but also have the potential to differ for young people in foster care. For example, consider the contemporary dilemma of whether to add your parents as a friend, or accept their friend request, on Facebook has become an issue that many people have to contemplate, both children and adults, Time magazine referred to it as a 'philosophical quandary' (Fletcher 2009). For the young people in this study, friending parents and family members had its challenges but it did not present as a quandary, for most of them it was actually an opportunity. It was a key medium to maintain regular contact with family members and one of the few methods of contact that they had any element over which they had control. For example, Nicola's direct contact with her family was governed by social workers; it was arranged by adults and supervised by adults. Therefore, by not adding her family members on Facebook she would have impaired her access to the bonding social capital that they represent.

It is apparent in the data that Web2.0 technologies are currently critically important in enabling young people to develop their access to social capital. The value that young people place on social media was

reflected in the photographs that the young people took during the photo elicitation part of the project, when they were asked to take photos of things that were important to them images of Facebook, PlayStations and mobile phones dominated. When these photographs were discussed the underlying importance of them was the relationships that the devices or technology facilitated. For example, Luke's limited time on the Ps3 was not just about the fun of the game but it was important to him because he was interacting with friends from school.

The practices that these young people are engaging in on social media contradict Putnam's assertion that Web 2.0 technologies represent a decline in connectedness and as such a threat to social capital (Putnam 2001). Without these technologies the participants' social capital could be impaired as they represent a key form of communication. Findings in this study also contradict Wellman & Haythornthwaite's (2008) claim that online interactions merely supplement in-person interactions. For the young people in this study supplementing in-person interactions was often not an option, as there were obstacles in the way that prevented them from physically meeting with friends and family from the past, due to their move into care. The reasons young people valued Web 2.0 technologies were because they were one of the limited ways they have to exercise their agency and maintain their social networks and subsequently their access to social capital.

To understand the importance of these findings to contemporary social work policy and practice it is pertinent to consider the current advice that is given to social work practitioners and foster carers about Web 2.0 technologies. This advice is generally dominated by the risks of internet use and social media, and it often fails to acknowledge any potential benefits (See, Falkirk Council 2010; Devon County Council 2012). There is a focus on supervision and restriction, that is evidenced through practical advice about siting pcs in common areas and installing parental controls. However, with

the integrative nature of Web 2.0 technologies and their increasing accessibility across society, such as on mobile phones and tablets, practice approaches that focus on attempting to restrict or supervise the access of children and young people to their foster carers home pc, present as an increasingly ineffective response. These overly protective responses also impinge on a young person's right to freedom of association (Human Rights Act, Article 11, 1998) and more specifically the rights of the children to meet together (UNICEF, Article 15, 1989), which is apparent if one considers how Web 2.0 technologies have become increasingly important in mediating people's interactions.

Existing practice responses also often fail to acknowledge what has been borne out here in the findings, that there are positive benefits that young people in foster care gain from engaging in Web 2.0 practices. Existing advice privileges a practice response of supervision and the restriction of access for welfare reasons. Given the findings in this thesis that highlight the affordances of Web 2.0 technologies for young people in foster care, particularly in relation to preserving pre-existing relationships and networks, it is important to acknowledge policies and practices that attempt to restrict access are themselves a potential risk to young people's wellbeing. The risk of over protective approaches is that they could have a significant negative impact on a young person's ability to maintain the relationships in their social networks and as a result their access to social capital.

Although Facebook and online games are undoubtedly an important mediating factor that can help young people build their capacity to access social capital, this is of course very much a finding of 'this time' and if this research was conducted in another age it could have been a different communication method that raised anxiety. For example, in 2005 it could have been the mobile phone and before that it could have been the public phone box. Furthermore, if the fieldwork had been conducted twelve months

later the data may have followed recent UK trends that suggest the use of Facebook may be in decline with applications such as Instagram, Pinterest and Snapchat becoming the current predominant vehicles of communication (YouGov 2014).

Children and young people have been quick to embrace new technologies and they have been described as 'digital natives' (Prensky 2001), growing up in a connected world with benefits of web2.0 technologies. For adults it has been documented that it can be difficult to keep up with these changes and as such Prensky describes adults as digital immigrants. With this in mind it is important that policy and practice reacts now and in the future to changing social networking technologies and learns from children and young people about the technologies they use. In doing this it is important to look at the ways that not only ascertain the risks posed to individual children and young people, but also to attempt to understand the affordances and to recognise the potential benefits that they may get from using these evolving modes of communication. Young people are utilising Web 2.0 technology all the time and it is important to them, as they are able to preserve and manage their relationships and networks. This potentially leads to them having access to social capital. Therefore, the findings in this study indicate that it is essential to ensure young people in foster care have access to Web 2.0 technology.

Lost personal possessions and the impact on social capital

For the young people in this study personal possessions enabled them to create displays of their social networks as a way to memorialise their relationships, which served to preserve their networks and their access to their social capital. Therefore, possessions should be treated by the adults

who are involved in the young people's lives with the same level of importance that the young people ascribe to them.

Transitional objects have long been recognised in family placement as important in relation to a child's attachments to their parent (Fahlberg 1991; Holmstrom 1999; Timms & Thoburn 2003; Hughes 2006). Findings in this study show that personal possessions can have an importance beyond an attachment to a parent and items can serve as symbolic representations of a wide range of relationships. Presents from school friends, to photographs of previous carers, the collections of possessions that were displayed and indeed cherished by the young people in this study, were representations of their social networks. Some of the foster carers and social workers clearly understood this point. For example, Samuels' carers had bought picture frames so that family photos could be displayed and protected behind glass, a process that Samuel valued. However, because entry into foster care can happen in chaotic emergency situations (Sinclair 2005) there is a possibility that young people can become separated from their possessions. For example, Anna had been waiting for twelve months for her personal possessions from her family home. Anna's new foster carer seemed to have understood their importance by substituting these treasured possessions from her past with new versions, a collection of relatively old movies on DVD and a cuddly toy that was similar to an old lost teddy bear. However, given the considerable amount of existing research evidence that reinforces the importance of a child or young persons' personal possessions (Fahlberg 1991; Holmstrom 1999; Timms & Thoburn 2003; Hughes 2006), it is unacceptable that it took twelve months for someone to show Anna that they understood the importance of her belongings.

In recent times there have been specific policy responses that focus on the need to value the possessions of young people in care and to treat with them with respect. For example, the campaign group a National Voice

developed a no-bin bag charter that called for local authorities to ensure that children and young people did not move placement with their possessions in a bin bag, but instead had appropriate luggage to move with. The campaign had success in committing all of the local authorities in the UK to sign up to a “no bin bag policy”. The findings from this research, that show the importance of possessions, reinforce the importance of policies like these. Findings have shown the good practice of carers and social workers who clearly understand the importance of possessions, but findings also reveal that more can be done. Young people’s personal possessions serve as powerful symbolic representations of relationships in their social networks. The process of entering care can impact negatively on a child or young person’s social network and when their possessions are missing, it can serve to disrupt a young person’s network further, which in turn diminishes their access to social capital.

Recommendations for social work policy and practice: five key messages

This concluding section of the chapter makes recommendations for the discipline of social work that are based on the findings. These recommendations are presented in the following five key messages and they highlight the specific implications of this thesis for social work practice and policy in the field of family placement.

1. Social workers and foster carers should develop relationships with children and young people in foster care that have sufficient depth and continuity. This would enable them to understand how the young people they are supporting are engaged in often subtle practices, in individual ways, to preserve access to social capital. Through a commitment to relationship based practice, adults could also provide a positive and constructive relationship blueprint, which young people could model.
2. Foster care services should recognise the benefits of peer support for young people in care, particularly, it's potential to support young people to manage their identity and cope with stigma. The data suggests that opportunities for peer support are of value to fostered young people as they can provide access to valuable forms of bonding social capital. This is of importance as the challenge of stigma can potentially lead to exclusion, which can negatively impact on a person's ability to

develop and maintain relationships, networks and their subsequent access to social capital.

3. Social work needs to recognise the benefits of Web 2.0 technology, as it is apparent that increasing amounts of social interaction occurs through these various and evolving mediums of online communications. As data in this study shows, for young people in foster care the risks of not participating in Web 2.0 technology can mean lost connections in their social networks, which results in an increased threat to their ability to access social capital.
4. Foster care needs to provide young people with opportunities to participate in leisure activities. The term leisure activities also needs to be understood in broader terms, as the young people in this study were often engaged in activities that were heavily networked, such as online gaming, yet these appeared to be under-valued or misunderstood by the adults involved in their care. Therefore, it is important to understand on an individual basis, the specific networked activities that are important to each young person in order to be able to encourage, support and build on their existing capacity to participate. This is significant as social capital theory suggests leisure activities can potentially enable people to build relationships, networks and subsequently their access to social capital. This study found that when young people in foster care were supported and given the opportunity to participate they were able to form new relationships and develop their

networks, which represented the potential for them to increase their access to social capital.

5. Foster care should also facilitate young peoples' engagement in practices of memorialisation. Data showed the importance young people placed in their relationships from their past and this was evident when they engaged in practices of memorialisation. These practices were often displays of personal possessions with significant symbolic meaning, and which represented their resources of social capital. Therefore, foster care practice needs to recognise the importance of these practices and enable young people to engage in them. In order to achieve this, practitioners should understand the value and significance of the young people's possessions, as the data shows that personal items such as photographs, teddy bears, trophies and DVDs hold such symbolic importance.

Chapter 9 Conclusion

This final concluding chapter presents a reflection on the research process. The chapter begins with a concise conclusion that is a synthesis of the analysis. The chapter then highlights how the thesis makes an original contribution to knowledge both theoretically and methodologically. The limitations of the study are also considered and then finally suggestions are made for areas of future research.

Conclusion

The theoretical framework that was developed in the first part of this thesis, argued that potential resources exist within relationships in a social network and that they can provide a form of capital. Bourdieu (1986, p.250) claimed, in order to benefit from the resource of social capital, people engage in practices of continuous social exchange and he described this as 'unceasing sociability'.

The findings of this study exemplified what the theory predicted. This thesis shows that like everyone else, young people in foster care are engaging in these ordinary, yet unceasing, practices of sociability. In many ways they are doing this in a similar manner to the businessmen at the golf club or the academics at the conference, through nuanced and subtle communications. However, for young people in foster care they are able to do this in extraordinary circumstances. All of them, at a relatively early stage in their lives have experienced the challenge of being separated from their parents and the consequent disruption in their pre-existing social networks. Nevertheless, despite the challenges of this experience, the practices of sociability continue to be unceasing, as they serve to continue their bonds with the people in their networks that are most important to them, which allow them to maintain access to their bonding social capital. They achieve this by contributing and shaping their relationships through practices such

as emotionally supportive acts of reciprocity. They also make sophisticated judgements that allow them to minimise and overcome the challenges of stigma that they experience from being in care. Practices of memorialisation also enable them to continue their bonds with people from their past, which avoids their sources of social capital becoming lost. Furthermore, when the opportunities arise, and support is provided, young people persevere and make continual attempts to build their access to social capital by forming new relationships.

This study has implications for the discipline of social work. The thesis reinforces messages from previous research studies that call for a social work response to develop a more stable public care system, which aims to minimise disruption to children and young people's relationships. However, these arguments are already well made and have recurred in the literature over the past twenty years (Berridge & Cleaver 1987; Fratter et al 1991; Sinclair 2005). Therefore, this thesis also offers a particular utility for the discipline of social work, by illustrating how young people in foster care are minimising the consequences of what seems to be the inevitable disruption to social networks that entry into public care causes.

The rich qualitative data presented in the findings chapters provides a nuanced way of understanding and theorising how young people continually work, in both prosaic and at times heroic ways, to minimise this disruption to their relationships, networks and their subsequent access to social capital. Furthermore, by highlighting the importance of these unceasing and often subtle practices, it is hoped that social work can support young people more effectively, in the attempts within which they are already engaged, to minimise the damage of disrupted social networks.

Original contribution to knowledge

The original contribution that this research makes to knowledge can be divided into two key areas. Firstly, it makes an original methodological contribution through the combination of the visual methods it employed to explore. Secondly, it makes an original theoretical contribution by applying this theory of social capital, as understood by Bourdieu (1986), as an analytical framework to explore the experiences of young people in foster care.

Theoretical contribution

By applying this theory of social capital to the empirical reality of the lived experiences of young people in foster care, this thesis as such has tested its utility in explaining a specific social phenomenon. The concepts have proven to have particular utility in providing understandings of the ways the young people engage in networked practices. The notion of bonding social capital being a resource that provides emotional support, helped to make sense of the commitment that young people had to preserving, maintaining and continually attempting to build their networks. Therefore, the thesis contributes to the body of knowledge that has started to identify how social capital is a concept that has heuristic utility for research with children and young people (Morrow 1999; Holland et al. 2007; Weller 2006). It also demonstrates clearly that young people are active social agents, and although Bourdieu's initial conceptualisation frames them as passive recipients of social capital, this thesis reinforces the findings from the work that young people in foster care are not passive and they manage practices that enable to maintain access to their social capital in challenging contextual circumstances.

There was a need to develop the theoretical frame of social capital with the application of Goffman's conceptualisation of stigma. This is also makes an original contribution to knowledge, as stigma served as a useful concept that highlighted how exclusion can serve to challenge a person's access to social capital. The analysis highlighted how although stigma was an obstacle to overcome, when fostered young people came together to form their own in-groups this challenged stigma and provided a source of social capital.

Methodological contribution

The visual methods of eco-mapping and photo elicitation have been utilised across a range of settings with children and young people. However, the combination of these methods appears to be a novel approach and there seems to be no other research at this time that has applied them with young people in foster care. Eco maps have been used in previous research with children and young people in foster care (Hunt et al. 2008; Farmer & Moyers 2008). This research builds on that knowledge but utilises eco-maps in a different way. They were employed, not to count connections and to generate quantitative data, but to explore with the young people their relationships and their interactions in their network in a qualitative way, and in so doing they helped to identify subtle practices that enabled them to access social capital. The application of the photo elicitation approach with young people in foster care also seems to be an innovative approach. Therefore, the images that the young people created that provided insights into the otherwise hidden experiences of their journeys through foster care are in themselves an original contribution to knowledge.

Limitations and areas for future research

The sample of this study was small in size. This was a justified methodological choice as it enabled the collection of rich, contextualised data, which highlighted the experiences of a potentially hard to reach and vulnerable group. However, because of the sample size the ability to make generalisations about these findings is limited. The sample was also drawn from one local authority, so the practices that existed may not be atypical. For example, the group for looked after children that provided valuable peer support may or may not exist in differing forms in other local authorities. However, this small scale qualitative study has made an important contribution with a detailed application of sociological concepts to a distinct social phenomenon. It is this detail that is of use to the discipline and the specificity of the findings warrant the implications that have been drawn for social work practice and policy.

Future research suggestions

An interesting area for future research would be to undertake a longitudinal study that follows the experiences of these young people. A future study could explore how their relationships in their networks have been preserved or developed and analyse the ways they access social capital as they grow up in foster care and transition from public care to independence. This could also potentially provide insights into the concept of bridging social capital, which did not feature in the findings to any great extent. In the literature bridging social capital is often described as a resource that can help you get ahead, and it has been documented as having value in the field of employment (Putnam 2001; Granovetter 1973). Therefore, a possible avenue for future research could be a study of the young people's initial entry into the world of work. This would not only enable the utility of the concept of bridging social capital to be tested with this population; but it

could potentially provide useful insights for social work in how best to support young people with this transition.

This analytical framework and the methodological approach could be applied to other populations to test their utility further. For example, this approach could offer insights into the experiences of young people in residential care, because as Thoburn (1994) suggests these young people are often the most stigmatized by the public care system.

This framework could also be applied to research with the parents of children placed in public care, as it could offer a mechanism to understand how their relationships, networks, and their subsequent access to social capital are affected, which could have benefit in finding ways to best support them.

References and Appendices

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Appendix 1 Semi structured interview schedule

Semi structured interview schedule

1st visit

Introductions

Thanks for meeting with me I am doing research about what it's like to live in foster and I am really interested in finding out about your life.

So I thought we could start by drawing a map of your life. With this map we will try and represent all the people and places that are important to you.

Let's put you in the centre then draw the people who are closest to you nearest to you

Ok so that's you in the middle, now where should we start?

People

What about people that you want to put on this map?

Tell me about them?

What do you do together? So when you have time together tell me about some of the things you do? Where do you go?

What about the most important people to you?

Why are they important to you?

(Follow the people) Are there other people we should put on this map?

Why/what/where

We can come back to people in case you remember more but shall we move on to important places?

Places

What about places on this map?

Where is the most important place to you?

What is important about...?

What do you like about...?

(Follow the places)

What about other places? What is important about...? What do you like about...?

Participation

(Activities social/civic ... formal/informal)

So what are you into? What do you spend your time doing?

When you have nothing else to do what do you like to do?

When you have some spare time what would you choose to do?

Tell me about it? Where... who with...when... What's good about it?

(Follow the activities)

Introduce the photo project provide them with the 'photo researcher briefing notes'.

The aim of the photo project is to gain insights into social and civic participation.

So the aim is to take ten photos that represent the places and activities that are important to you. Try not to take photos of people because they might not want to be involved in the project and I would not have their permission to take part. So stick to photos that represent the places and activities that are important to you.

The idea is I leave you with the camera for the next two weeks to take photos. Then next time I come out we can look at the photos together and you can tell me all about them. I only want to look at ten photos so you will have to select the ones that are most important to you.

2nd visit

Present the completed Eco map for the young people to review, amend and make additions to. Explore the map with the young people

People (Social Networks Reciprocity)

On this map who are the people that support you?

Who would you go to if you had a problem?

What about people that you support?

Are there people that share their problems with you?

(Absence)

Let's have a look anyone that you think we may have missed off?

What about people who are important to you that you don't see very much

Tell me about them?

(What about people they have missed off)

(Apparent Absences, are they deliberately left off, exploring the reasons why?)

Places

(Absence)

Let's have a look any places that you think we have missed off?

(Space for response)

Are there places important to you that you don't go to anymore?

(Absence)

(What about places they have been missed off... for example school/work)

(Apparent Absences, are they deliberately left off, explore the reasons why?)

Participation

(Online Time)

Do you use the internet and social networking sites to stay in touch with people?

What about online gaming?

What does that involve? Who with? How often?

Move on to the photographs

Tell me about this photo?

What is in it?

Why did you take it?

Appendix 2 Information sheet for social workers



Exploring young people's experiences of foster care.

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Exploring young people's experiences of foster care

For this PhD research project, the focus is on young people's experiences of foster care. The study will explore how young people interact with their carers, family, peers and wider community.

To explore the social networks of young people in foster care I intend to undertake two qualitative interviews directly with young people. During the first interview an ecomap will be completed to gather information about their social connections and their community participation. The ecomap is being used as a means to stimulate discussion using a creative and fun visual tool.

At the end of the first interview participants will be given the opportunity to act as 'photo researchers' for the project. Young people will then be asked to take photos of places that are important to them and photos of things that represent the activities they take part in. Full consideration will be given to the ethical issues involved in taking photos and clear briefing notes will be explained and given to the young people with the cameras. The young people will be asked to avoid taking photos of people due to consent issues and instead stick to photos of places and objects. Due to the complexity of obtaining consent any photographs taken of people will not be used in the study. The second interview will be scheduled two weeks later in order to review and revise the ecomaps and to discuss the photos taken.

The research tools and the interview schedules are intended to be designed in an age-appropriate way that encourages young people's active involvement and participation in the project.

This project has received ethical permission from the University of Bath to commence. However, ethics will also be viewed as an on-going process and the project will attempt to keep ethical practice at its core and minimise undue upset to the participants. The interviews will be digitally recorded; the recordings will be destroyed once transcribed and analysed. At the point of transcription the data will be fully anonymised and names will be changed.

An information sheet and a website describing the project has been designed for the young people and at the beginning of the first interview the project will be fully explained to ensure the young people are able to give their informed consent to participate.

An information sheet about the project has also been devised for the adults that hold parental responsibility for the young people. The information sheet will provide an opportunity for them to object to their child's participation and in effect opt out of the project. An information sheet has also been prepared for carers.

All participants will have the right to withdraw consent up until the time of the projects intended submission in October 2014.

The research will be carried out by one person Justin Rogers who is a registered social worker and has a current enhanced CRB disclosure from the University of Bath (dated 18th August 2011).

In Summary:

Participants:

Young people aged 12-14 years old who ideally have been in a foster care placement for at least six months.

Methods:

The research will involve two qualitative interviews with each young person.

During the first interview an ecomap will be completed and then the young people will be briefed for the 'photo researcher' project. The photos will then be taken over the course of the following week.

The second interview will take place two weeks later in order to review the completed ecomap and discuss the photos that have been taken.

The interviews will take place at a convenient and safe location and at a time suitable for the young people.

Ethics:

Ethical permission from the University of Bath has been granted. The researcher holds a current enhanced CRB disclosure.

Appendix 3 Information sheet for young people

A research project that wants to listen to young people in foster care.

There have been lots of research projects that have asked parents, carers and social workers about foster care. However, there have not been very many projects that speak to young people. This project wants to gather views directly from young people living in foster care. It is hoped that the project will find out important information about what it is like to live in foster care today.

This leaflet gives you information about the project to help you decide if you want to join in.

This research wants to know what your day to day life is like, the things you do and the people you know.

Questions you might want to ask me?

Who are you?

I am Justin Rogers and I am a student researcher at The University of Bath. The university does lots of research and it is also a place that trains researchers.

How are you going to do the research?

I would like to come along and meet with you to talk about the people you know and the things you do. If you agree I would tape our conversation and then after our meeting I will type up what was said (changing your name) and then delete the tape.

What do you want to know?

I will ask some personal things like what you do outside of school and what people are important to you in your life. I will also ask what you think about living in this area. Of course if you do not want to answer any specific question you do not have to!

Is it confidential?

This project is independent of the local authority and what you say is confidential, (I will not tell anyone what you told me, unless you tell me something that makes me really worried about your safety and even then I would discuss this with you first).

Will I see the report?

The report from the research will take me two years to complete! In a few months after we meet I will send you a bulletin to let you know what I have found out so far from all the young people I have met with! I hope in the future the research will be published so people can learn from young people's experiences and improve foster care in the future.

If you have any further questions you can check my website

www.justinrogers.net or you can email me at Justin@justinrogers.net

I think it is important to learn directly from young people in foster care and I would really like you take part!

Appendix 4 Young people's consent form

Consent Form

This interview is part of a research project to explore young people's experiences of foster care.

The interviews will be recorded on a digital recorder and stored securely. Only my supervisor and I will listen to the recording. Then the recording will be typed up and your real name will not be used at any point (a made up name will be used instead). Once the research is completed the recordings will be deleted.

If you agree to act as a photo researcher the photos you take may be used in the completed research reports. None of the photos will be used without you giving specific consent for their inclusion.

You have a right to withdraw your consent at any point during the group and at a later stage of the study, prior to the submission of the completed project in 2014.

This research is independent of the local authority and what you say is confidential. I will not tell anyone what you have told me, unless you tell me something that makes me really worried about your safety.

If you feel upset by any of the issues that come up in the interview, there will be an opportunity to discuss these and support will be identified for you. By signing this form you give consent to take part in this study and confirm that you understand the points described above.

Signed: _____

Date: ____/____/____

Appendix 5 University of Bath Ethics Form

ETHICS APPROVAL

This document comprises pages 1 and 2 and must be completed.

You must then attach: page 3 - a summary of the research proposal (including full referencing, if cited) and page 4 - a series of headings from the Ethics Checklist below that have been ticked as noted, each heading being followed by a brief paragraph on how any issues have been addressed.

You should use A4 paper, 12pt type and normal margins. If you are conducting research on a Placement or in association with another body where ethical approval has to be granted through a professional body, for example the NHS, or another University department, it is sufficient to append only the first two pages to the front of the ethical approval granted by the other body. In all other cases, ALL research must meet the Department's Ethics Committee requirements. To do this, consult your Department's guidance. For project work with supervision, pass a draft copy of your completed ethics form to your supervisor for discussion before submitting a final copy to your supervisor and ensuring it is appended to the final piece of work submitted. The full application should be emailed to the Postgraduate Research Administrator who will liaise with the Ethics Officer regarding approval. NB: you cannot begin work on your research until this approval is obtained.

Ethics Checklist: - page 1

Issue	Noted	Not applicable
A justification for the research	√	
Avoidance of deception, presentation of purpose of study	√	
Arrangements for debriefing, including access to support	√	
Obtaining consent, including right to withdraw	√	
Avoidance of distress or threats to self-esteem	√	
Privacy and confidentiality	√	
Special circumstances (e.g. respondents who cannot give consent, children under 16, unusual issues around privacy)	√	
Additional general ethical issues	√	

STUDENT TO COMPLETE

Name of Applicant (please print): JUSTIN ROGERS

Email: jmr32@bath.ac.uk Tel:

Programme: MPhil/PhD, Department of Social & Policy Sciences

I hereby confirm that this document represents an accurate record of my proposed research.

Student's signature: J Rogers.....

STAFF MEMBER TO COMPLETE

You must show your supervisor your completed ethics form (all 4 pages) and obtain their agreement (evidenced through their signature below) that your proposal is of an appropriate academic standard to be forwarded to the Departmental Ethics Committee.

I hereby confirm that this proposal is of an appropriate academic standard to be forwarded to the Departmental Ethics Committee.

Name of Supervisor: Professor Ian Butler

Supervisor's signature: I Butler

PAGES 3 AND 4

Please append page 3 and 4 in line with the guidance provided on page1

Summary of the research proposal

In the United Kingdom 87,000 children and young people are 'looked after' by the state. The majority of these, over 70%, live in foster care arrangements. This PhD project aims to explore the experiences of young people living in foster care.

The data will be collected through two qualitative semi-structured interviews with young people aged 12-14 years old. During the first interview an eco-map will be completed to examine the young people's social networks and the embedded resources within. The eco map will be used as a flexible tool intended to guide discussion about the participant's social networks, whilst allowing the interview to remain open to explore the areas of their networks that are important and relevant to the young people's own experience. The project will also gather data using photo elicitation. At the end of the first interview the young people will be loaned a digital camera in order to take photos over the following two weeks that represent the public places and public activities that are most important to them. The content of these photos will then be discussed in a follow up interview.

The study will use the concept of social capital as an analytical device. Social capital highlights the potential resources that are embedded in social networks. Bourdieu's (1986) approach to the concept is being adopted which frames social capital as a fungible resource that is rooted in practices and processes that enables the acquisition of other forms of capital. Social capital will form a significant part of the study's conceptual framework and it has been chosen in order to explore how young people in foster care interact with their family, carers, peers and the wider community. The application of this concept to young people in foster care is a new area of inquiry. This study will critically examine the concept of social capital and analyse its application as a heuristic device to explore the day to day lives of young people in foster care. The research aims to provide a snapshot of how the young people interviewed interact with the processes and practices of social capital.

A justification for the research

In the UK young people in foster care are a vulnerable group whose early life experiences can have a negative effect on their future life chances. A growing body of research exists that explores fostering practice. However, literature that focuses on young people's experiences is more limited. This social work research project has the values of social justice at its core and it aims to learn important lessons for practice and policy directly from young people.

Avoidance of deception, presentation of purpose of study

The project will be explained to the young people in an age appropriate way with an information sheet that provides details of the project. A website has also been developed so young people can read about the aims of the project online. Near the completion of the project a short paper that outlines the research findings will be published on the website and also sent to the participants.

Arrangements for debriefing, including access to support

Research suggests that young people in foster care are likely to have experienced abuse and neglect. They are therefore a vulnerable group and it is important to acknowledge that this research, that will explore personal information, has the potential to cause them upset. In the event of a participant becoming upset the researcher is a registered social worker who has worked in residential and foster care and has experience of supporting young people with emotional difficulties. Time will be set aside at the end of each interview to ensure the young people are settled and not experiencing distress and where appropriate avenues of support will be identified with them.

Obtaining consent, including right to withdraw

After fully informing the young people about the project, on an individual

basis in a way that they understand, consent to participate will be gained by asking them to sign a consent form. A copy of the consent form will also be given to them. Participants will also be informed that they can withdraw their consent to participate up until the projects submission in 2014. The local authority social workers will also be asked to consent for the young person to participate as they hold shared parental responsibility with the parents. The parents of the young people will be asked for their consent by the social workers, if they are not able to contact them an information sheet will be sent to them, which will give them the option to withdraw their child's consent to participate.

Avoidance of distress or threats to self-esteem

The research aims to adopt an empowering methodology that values and respects the contribution of the young people and will aim to represent their experiences in an honest and trustworthy manner. It will also be made explicit to young people that they only have to answer the questions they want to and can stop the interview at any time.

Privacy and confidentiality

The interviews will be digitally recorded and fully anonymised at the point of transcription. The digital recordings will be stored securely and password protected on the University computers until the end of the project when they will be deleted. The young people will be informed that what they say in the interviews is confidential however, they will also be informed that if they disclose an issue where a child is at risk of harm then confidentiality will be broken. This is covered in the consent form in the following way and will be explained at the start of the interviews. *"What you say is confidential. I will not tell anyone what you have told me, unless you tell me something that makes me really worried about your safety."*

Special circumstances (e.g. respondents who cannot give consent, children under 16,

unusual issues around privacy)

An information sheet will also be sent to the person who holds parental responsibility, which will offer them the opportunity to withdraw the young people from the project. This poses the ethical dilemma of young people who may wish to participate being excluded. Complex ethical issues like these will be fully discussed in supervision.

Additional general ethical issues

This use of photo-elicitation methods will form a part of the project in an attempt to gather qualitative data in a way that is engaging for the young people who participate in the study. At the end of the first interview the young people will be provided with a digital camera and asked to take photographs over the following week. The young people will be asked to take photographs that represent the things they do. As well as the places they go to that are important to them. The young people will be encouraged not to take photos of people for the project to avoid the complex issues of gaining consent to participate in the study. Once the photos have been taken a follow up interview will be arranged and the photographs will be used to elicit conversations about the activities and places that are important to them. The young people will be asked to take 10 photos each for the project and will be asked which of the photos they give permission to be used in the publication. The young people will also be provided with digital copies of the photographs. The research governance procedures of the local authorities where the research will take place will be fully adhered to. The names of the local authorities will be made anonymous in the final report. A summary report of the research will be completed at the end of the project and sent to the local authorities. Ethical issues will be considered on an ongoing basis throughout this project and reviewed in supervision to ensure young people do not experience undue harm and that their contributions are confidential and represented in an honest and trustworthy manner.

Appendix 6

An independent research project that wants to listen to young people in foster care

I am a researcher from the University of Bath and I am undertaking some research in the area with young people who live in foster care. The research is independent of the local authority and it aims to learn directly from young people's experiences

The research is with young people aged 12- 14 years old and has shown an interest in participating. The research will involve two short interviews and an exercise that includes the young people taking photos of places and activities important to them in the community.

I think it is very important to listen and learn directly from young people in foster care and I would really like to take part. The research will be carried out by one researcher; the names of the young people who take part in the study will be changed in the final report to ensure confidentiality is maintained.

If you do not want to take part or if you have any questions about the research please contact me either on or via email at Justin@justinrogers.net

If I do not hear from you by I will assume that you are happy for to take part.

Many Thanks

Justin Rogers